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The Specter Yacht; OR, A BROTHER'S CRIME.

The Romance of a Haunted Heart
and a Havenless Cruise.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "THE SCARLET SCHOONER," "DON
DIABLO," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GAIN-ACCURSED.

UPON a bold and rugged point of land, that forms the right bank of a beautiful river flowing into the ocean, from the island-studded coast of Maine, there may still be seen the ruins of an old fort, built by our ancestors, kind reader, long before you and I were born.

Deserted after the war, Time had year after year effaced its warlike look, and ruin and desolation claimed it as their own.

From the high position it occupied, a commanding view could be obtained of the island-dotted coast, the far-off open sea, and inland, of the winding river with its forest-lined banks.

Back from the fort stretched the dark forest, parted by a carriage-drive that wound away out of sight until lost in its gloom; but adown this drive I would carry the reader for the distance of half a mile, where a scene of wonderful beauty bursts upon the view.

The road leads into a large lawn or park, and in the distance can be seen the white walls of a lordly mansion, surrounded by ornamental grounds, groups of statuary, *tête-à-tête* arbors, and every adornment to prove that it is the home of refinement and wealth.

Suddenly the sound of hoofs is heard, and dashing away from the mansion are two persons, a gentleman and lady on horseback. Following the broad carriage drive they soon come to where it enters the forest, and a moment

after they are riding at a rapid gait toward the old fort.

Arriving at the dismantled fortress they draw rein, and gaze long and anxiously out upon the distant ocean.

The sun is near its setting, and a flood of crimson glory rests upon land and sea, and the reflection falls with mellow tint upon the maiden's cheek, and adds a warm light to her dark-blue eyes, as she sits gracefully in her saddle, half-shading her face with her gloved hand.

Even the greatest bachelor skeptic of womanly beauty would not call Alice Gray other than beautiful, as she thus rests and glances out upon the sea.

Slightly above the medium height of women, her dark-green riding-habit displays to great advantage her graceful and exquisite form, while her lovely face is a study that an artist would never tire of, for the passionate eyes, curtained by long lashes, the beautiful, but expressive mouth, the clear complexion, and brown waving hair make up a picture of rare loveliness, while the expectant and rather anxious



"IT IS THE SPECTER YACHT! NO STORM WILL EVER SINK THAT CRAFT."

expression that beams in her face but adds another charm to the fair young girl upon whom the eighteen years of her life had showered only sunshine and joy.

Her companion was a young man of about twenty-four years of age, with a fine form that showed to advantage as he carelessly sat in the saddle, and whose handsome face also wore an anxious look.

They were strangely alike, these two—so much so, indeed, that a stranger would have believed them brother and sister, for the same brown hair and clear complexion, the dark-blue eyes, and expressive mouth, and face devoid of beard, caused a close resemblance between Henry Alberti and Alice Gray; and yet they were bound together by no ties of kindred, but bonds of love united them more closely than had they been brother and sister—they were lovers.

For some moments they sat in silence, and then Henry Alberti turned to his companion and said, while a troubled look rested upon his fine face:

"Alice, I dread the return of Claude, more than I have hitherto admitted; I almost feel base at heart for having stolen your love from him. Knowing how I prize it, how well I can appreciate his suffering when he finds you are no longer his promised wife!"

"Hush, Henry; you must not speak thus. In the happy days when Claude was with me, I learned to love him, I then believed with my whole heart; but when he went to South America in his yacht, and shortly afterward you returned from abroad, then I felt that Claude was as a brother to me—that *you* possessed my love, and regretted my engagement to Claude and longed to be free to win your heart."

"You did win me from the first, Alice; but knowing your engagement to my brother, I dared not show it, until that unlucky—no, I cannot call it so—that happy day when I found you seated there on that old gun-carriage crying over my picture. Then, my darling, I told you of my love, for I felt that I possessed your heart. Would to God that Claude were here, and all doubt settled, for when he returns and finds you lost to him, I fear for the result."

"Banish such fears, Henry; Claude is too noble not to forget and forgive. His passionate nature will receive a severe shock, but all will yet be well. Look! is not that the glance of a sail?" and the maiden pointed out upon the ocean, where a distant speck had attracted her gaze.

"Yes, it is a sail, but not the Wanderer I fear. No; it is a fishing-smack, bound up the coast," answered Henry, after a long look at the distant vessel.

"I will tell you what we will do, Alice," he continued, after a pause: "I will aid you to dismount and we can sit here upon this gun-carriage and wait an hour or two; the horses can feed upon the grass in the fort, and we can watch for the Wanderer's coming, for I firmly believe the yacht will arrive to-night, as Claude has had ample time since the day which he set in his last letter for leaving New York."

The maiden eagerly acquiesced in the proposal of her companion, and while the horses were turned loose in the fort the lovers sat down to plan over the future.

The sun had gone down beyond the distant hills and the crimson-gold light of the god of day was slowly fading away before the silvery radiance of the rising moon, which marked a broad pathway across the ocean, and by its rays lit up the ruined fortress, the river and the forests with its silver sheen.

One, two hours passed away, and still the lovers sat and talked over the past and the future, and in their own happiness had forgotten to watch closely for a sail upon the ocean.

Rapidly the distant sail, first discovered by Alice, and pronounced by Henry to be a fishing-boat, had arisen above the horizon, and displayed the graceful and beautiful model of a large yacht.

With every sail set that would draw, the yacht bounded lightly along over the moonlit ocean, and shaped her course toward the mouth of the river, which in years gone by had been defended by the fortress that frowned upon the cliff that towered above.

A glance at the swiftly-moving vessel showed that below and aloft she was in perfect trim; every rope and sail was in thorough order, the decks were neatly kept, and the four guns she carried, two amidships and one on bow and stern, seemed ready for instant use. The long, low hull, painted white, the tall raking masts, and the guns gave her a look that showed she would be a worthy antagonist either in a chase or combat.

Upon her decks forward were several groups of seamen standing listlessly gazing upon the dark islands here and there dotting the coast, but ready at a moment's notice to obey any order from their commanding officers, who stood in a group aft and watched through their glasses the land they were approaching, and which served as a dark background to the picture of the moonlit ocean.

Standing near the helmsman was an officer

whose uniform and bearing singled him out as the commander of the yacht, and from time to time as he gave an order to the man at the wheel the tones of his voice were deep and full.

"See! there looms the old fort, Preston; there against the sky you can see the outlines of the embrasures," said the commander, addressing one of the three officers who stood near him.

"Yes, Claude, and soon you will be at Elgin," answered the person addressed, a handsome, blue-eyed, light-haired youth of twenty.

"The tide is out, and we cannot cross the bar to-night, so I will land at the foot of the hill, and go on foot to Elgin, and in the morning you can come up the river in the Wanderer," returned the captain, and turning to the helmsman he continued:

"Run her into the shelter of that second island, Pierre, and we'll drop anchor."

"Ay, ay, sir," and on bounded the yacht until she rounded the point of the island referred to, and then, as if by magic, the white sails were furled, the anchor let go, and a boat was in readiness to carry the commander ashore.

Springing into the cutter, the captain called out:

"Come in with the tide in the morning, Preston, and anchor in the river near Elgin."

"Yes, Claude," was the reply.

"Give way, men," and the light cutter dashed shoreward.

Seated in the stern, the captain steered his boat to a point on the beach, just at the foot of the cliff, and jumping ashore, he ordered the men to return to the yacht, while he turned into a narrow pathway and rapidly began the ascent of the hill.

He had nearly reached the fortress, when he turned and glanced backward and across the bay toward his yacht, which was quietly riding at anchor far below him.

As the moonlight shone full upon him, it showed a tall, commanding figure, clad in a rich uniform; the naval cap upon his head did not hide a mass of dark waving hair, nor cast in shadow a strikingly handsome face in which were mingled pride, passion and recklessness. The black eyes were large and full of fire, while the mouth, though almost hidden by a black silken mustache, indicated both generosity and determination.

For some moments he gazed silently upon the beautiful scene around him, and while a frown darkened his brow, he muttered to himself:

"I cannot account for it. I cannot shake off the feeling; but on all my homeward voyage I have felt that some great grief would come to me. Can anything have happened to Alice, or father, or Henry? For he must be at home now, as he was to leave Europe six months ago; bless the dear boy's heart—how glad I will be to see him, for it has been three years since we parted at Heidelberg; yes, he is a man now: let me see, two years my junior, and I twenty-six—bless me, I am getting on in years. The last time I looked upon this old fort was a year ago to-night; father and Alice stood there and waved me an adieu as I sailed away, and until hull down at sea, I looked back through the darkness, and saw the flash of the fire they had built to prove that they were still waiting kind wishes after the wanderer, and bidding him God-speed; but I must not linger here dreaming of the past, when a bright future awaits me yonder in dear old Elgin; but hush! I hear voices. Can it be that they have come to the fort to greet my coming sail? 'Tis Henry's voice, and—and—oh, God! what is that he says?"

For an instant the yachtsman stood and listened. Not ten feet from him were the ramparts of the fort, and in the embrasure, seated upon the time-worn gun-carriage sat Alice and Henry, the girl's head resting lovingly upon his shoulder, his arm around her waist.

Henry was speaking, and it was his words that had so startled the stranger—he was saying:

"Then, darling, if Claude does not forgive us, if he is angered with me for stealing from him your love, then we will leave Elgin, and in some other land seek a new home where we can be happy in each other's love—"

"Liar! Traitor to your own blood! No woman's love shall ever bless home of thine," and with a bound Claude Alberti sprang into the embrasure, his face livid with rage, and leveling a pistol, fired—a flash, a report, a shriek, and Henry Alberti fell to the ground.

In frenzy Alice threw herself upon the form of her lover, but the pallid lips returned no response to her passionate kisses.

"Oh, God! he is dead!" and rising she turned toward Claude, who stood with folded arms gazing with hard, cold face upon the deed his hand had wrought.

"Murderer, you have killed him!—your brother! The curse of Cain rests upon you forevermore. Go!"

"Alice!"

"Go, sir! Never again come where my eyes may behold you!"

"Alice, hear me!"

"Not one word. Go, and may this night's scene ever be present with you; leave me, and

take my curse, a woman's heart-broken curse, with you!" and Alice Gray covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out from sight the face of the man before her.

One long look at the maiden before him, a shuddering glance at the form of his brother, and Claude Alberti turned away and slowly descended the path he had come toward the beach.

Arriving at the foot of the hill, his clear hail rung out over the waters, and echoed along the rocky coast.

"Yacht, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the shore!" came the answer.

"Send the cutter ashore for me at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and fifteen minutes after Claude Alberti stood on the deck of his beautiful vessel.

His men saw by his hard, stern face, and knew by the angry tones of his voice, that some uncommon cause had brought him again aboard the yacht; so when he gave orders to at once get under way they obeyed with alacrity.

In a few minutes the Wanderer was under a full press of canvas, and standing rapidly seaward, while all on board were watching the stern face of their commander, and wondering what strange circumstance had caused him to so suddenly change his plans, and, when almost under the shadow of his home, to again put to sea.

With slow step, and in silence, Claude Alberti paced the deck, ever and anon turning in his walk and fixing his gaze upon the outlines of the fort which was rapidly becoming dim in the distance.

"This then is the end—oh, God! no! *the commencement!* One year ago to-night how different; then all hope, now all despair—I have lost her. I am the murderer of my brother. Where shall I go? What is to become of me now? I know not, I care not." For some moments the man stood silently and gazed off across the water toward the land, and then turning suddenly, he called out to his second officer:

"Mr. Minturn, put the schooner off a little, and when you have gained a good offing lay her on her course for Liverpool. Preston, I would speak with you in the cabin," and without another word he descended below decks, followed by his astonished lieutenant, and the wondering looks of his officers and crew, who, though surprised at their commander's action, and anxious to be again in their homes, to which they were so near, knew better than to disobey his orders, so without more ado the schooner's prow was pointed across the trackless ocean.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECTIVE GLANCE.

GENERAL ALBERTI had in early life served with distinction in the French army, but meeting, while traveling in America, with a lovely and wealthy heiress in Boston, he had offered his hand and heart, was accepted, and returning to France had resigned his commission, and after disposing of his vast estates, again sought the shores of America to claim his beautiful bride.

Soon after his arrival he was married to the woman of his love, and determined to give up his roving life, General Alberti visited the State of Maine, where he purchased the estate of Elgin, and which he at once began to improve without regard to cost.

As the years went by, he was happy in the love of his wife and children, for his union had been blest with two sons, Claude and Henry.

But at last the sunshine of his life at Elgin was obscured by a dark cloud—his lovely wife was taken from him by death, and almost broken-hearted by his loss, the devoted husband and father determined to leave the home where he had passed so many happy years, and return to Europe to educate his sons.

After five years passed abroad, General Alberti, leaving Claude and Henry at Heidelberg to finish their education, set sail for America, but not alone, for he was accompanied by a young girl of twelve years of age, the daughter of one of his oldest friends, who in dying in Paris had begged him to become her guardian.

It was with joy that the general accepted the charge, for the young girl had quite won him over by her beauty, and the affectionate devotion she had bestowed upon her father during his illness.

Mr. Gray was buried with great pomp in *Pere la Chaise*, near Paris, and soon after his daughter and her guardian were crossing the Atlantic.

Though at first feeling the loss of his wife's dear face at Elgin, the brightness of little Alice's love for him soon won him away from his sorrows, and he devoted his time to her education, and the improvement of his beautiful home.

Three years after his return to Elgin, Claude, his eldest son, came home, having completed his studies abroad, and between the young man and the lovely Alice, then fifteen, there sprung up a most tender affection.

With vast wealth at his command, left him by his mother, Claude devoted himself to all kinds of sports, but chiefest of all to that of yachting, of which he was very fond.

Visiting Baltimore, he had him a large and fleet-sailing yacht built, and forming a crew, from the young fishermen around Elgin, he frequently took long cruises in his handsome vessel.

Upon some of these voyages his father and Alice would accompany him, and thus the years passed on, bringing with them only happiness and contentment to the inmates at Elgin.

And as the months went by, and Alice reached her seventeenth year, Claude felt that he no longer loved her as a little sister, as she had hitherto been to him, but with all the warmth of his intense nature; and for him Alice professed a similar attachment, and soon afterward they became engaged, with the full sanction of General Alberti, who rejoiced to feel that the two whom he so deeply loved would be bound together through life by the holiest ties.

Around Elgin, here and there dotting the river-bank and front, were the country seats of a few families of wealth, and also the homes of an honest, but poorer class, the Maine fishermen.

With these Claude had become exceedingly popular, and by his generous, frank nature, and gentlemanly deportment, had gained an enviable reputation far and wide.

More than once he had risked his life to save those who had been driven upon the coast in the fearful storms that often visit that section, and often had the sick and needy in the humble fisherman's or farmer's cottage found him ever ready to aid them both by his purse and presence.

Therefore, when his yacht, the *Wanderer*, was completed, he had collected around him a strong and hardy crew, and three of the sons of the neighboring gentry he had appointed as his associate officers.

He had been at Elgin about two years, when his father deemed it necessary that some one should visit South America, where he had large interests, in Brazil and Peru, that demanded personal attention.

Speaking upon the subject to his son, Claude at once volunteered to go thither in his yacht, and personally settle the affairs, which offer his father readily accepted.

Alice begged hard that he would not go, but having determined upon the voyage, Claude would not yield, and the maiden became resigned to his departure, it having been arranged that upon his return, and the eighteenth anniversary of her birthday, they should be married.

With many tears from Alice, and warm words of love from Claude, the lovers parted, and spreading her white sails, the *Wanderer* left the forest-clad shores of Maine far astern, and shaped her course southward.

For months Claude was sadly missed by the two at Elgin, and long winter evenings they would sit around the fire and talk for hours about the absent sailor.

But news came from Europe that Henry would soon come home, and in preparation to receive him, and expectancy of his arrival Claude was, though not forgotten, less spoken of.

At length Henry came, and warm was the welcome he received from his father, and cordially he was greeted by Alice, for though they had never before met, they felt toward each other almost as though they were related by kindred bonds.

The halls and parlors of Elgin again echoed with the merry laugh, the roads around the mansion again became dusty with the rush of hoofs and whirl of wheels.

As Claude and Alice had passed the time in the days gone by, so did Henry and Alice while away the hours.

Driving, horseback-riding, sailing upon the river, and long walks were the order of the day, and three months had not passed away after Henry's return before the *Wanderer* and her commander were almost forgotten: no, not forgotten, but remembered with many a sigh by Alice, who felt that her feelings toward her absent lover had undergone a complete revolution.

Determined however to be true to the man she had promised to marry, the young girl smothered down many a sigh, checked many a tear, that might show to Henry and his father that she had ceased to love Claude. Thus with

A smile trembling on her lip
While tears were in her heart,"

she lived on, feeling strong in the determination to do her duty come what might.

Frequently she would wander alone to the old fort, book in hand, and seated upon the old gun-carriage, gaze out upon the ocean, hoping, yet dreading, to see the returning sail of the *Wanderer*.

One day she had gone thither, carrying in her hand, instead of a book, a miniature likeness of Henry, which he had presented her with some days before.

Lost in reverie for a while, she at length became overcome by her feelings, and kissing the picture passionately she burst into tears, exclaiming:

"Oh, Claude, I cannot love you now! Dear, dear Henry."

"Henry is with you, Alice."

Like a frightened fawn she sprung to her feet, exclaiming:

"Oh, Henry, what have I done, what have I said?"

"Alice, forgive me, I did not intend to intrude. I saw you come toward the fort, and followed you. Seeing you seated here, I stopped to look upon you, to feast my eyes upon your beauty, when your own words told me that I was loved. Alice, my own beautiful darling, my honor has kept me from before saying what I do now; I love you; between us, no longer, must there be a great gulf fixed, for you are mine in the sight of God; you are mine by the divine law of human love; naught can, naught shall part us now! Come to me, my darling," and in an instant the young girl sprung with a glad cry into Henry's arms.

Bitterly did General Alberti mourn over the sad affair, when told what a change had taken place, for he feared for the bitter blow that would fall upon Claude; but trusting in the generous nature of his eldest son, and the change that a year's absence might make, he became more reconciled.

Henry and Alice had been acknowledged lovers but a few short weeks, when a letter came from Claude, saying he had put into New York for repairs, and to have his yacht refitted, as he would make his bridal tour in her across the ocean, and inviting his father and brother to accompany himself and Alice; he also stated that he would sail from New York upon a specified day, and that the *Wanderer* should crowd all sail, to soon bring him to dear old Elgin and those whom he loved so well, and whom he felt anxiously longed for his return.

Claude's letter cut deep into the hearts of the small circle at the Elgin Homestead, and all felt deeply the severe blow they were to bring upon the frank and loving nature of the absent one.

Of the *Wanderer's* return, the unhappy meeting of the brothers, the sad result, and the hasty flight of the fleet yacht from the shores of America, the reader has been made acquainted in the foregoing chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE WANDERER AND HER CREW.

WITH amazement depicted upon his face, Preston May followed Claude into the cabin of the schooner, and silently took a seat he was motioned to, while his commander paced the floor, his hands clasped behind him, and his every feature working with the intensity of his feelings.

Suddenly stopping in front of his lieutenant, Claude said quickly and with earnestness:

"Preston, you have ever been my best friend; from early childhood up to the present time we have been as brothers, and through all my college scrapes, my wanderings and my dangers, you have never deserted me—"

"Nor ever shall, Claude!"

"Hush! you have been a friend to me, but now I intend to put that friendship to a test that I fear will break it. Listen: you knew of my engagement to Alice Gray; you knew how I was body and soul wrapped up in my love for her; that she has ever been, in imagination, present with me; both in storm, in calm, in joy and in sorrow, the remembrance of her has cheered me—has strengthened me. Furthermore, you knew that upon my return I was to be married to her, and we were to make our bridal tour to Europe in the *Wanderer*; also you know how dearly I have loved my brother; how I have trusted him; well, Preston, they have both failed me."

"To-night I landed, as you know, near the fort; I ascended the steep path rapidly, and upon coming near the first embrasure beheld a sight that froze my blood, a sight that drove me mad, for I was mad. Henry was there with Alice, she resting her head upon his shoulder; and his own words proved to me that he had stolen her from me, she being willing!"

"Oh, God! Preston, the agony of that moment; in an instant I stood before them, my pistol drawn; they sprung to their feet, I leveled my pistol, and shot my brother dead."

"Good God! Claude, what do you mean?" cried Preston May, springing to his feet and grasping his friend's arm.

"The truth, Preston; he fell at my feet, and she threw herself upon his body; then she arose and drove me from her presence with a bitter, bitter curse. Is it any wonder that the *Wanderer* is flying from that cursed shore, now, stained as it is with my brother's blood?"

"Now, Preston, I have made the confession," and Claude stood erect with folded arms awaiting reply from his friend.

The words came frankly in response.

"Claude, my poor friend, from my heart I pity you; indeed I do; I cannot now desert you, you have ever been too true a friend to me; that you had great cause for anger I admit, but would that you had not been so rash. The deed, however, is done now; there is no recalling it. You cannot return home; no other course is left but for you to seek another land; here is my hand, old fellow, for you to cling to, come what may in the future."

The proud, stern man strongly grasped the proffered hand, his head bent low; a shudder ran through his form, and Preston May saw a tear roll across the sun-bronzed cheek and fall upon the floor.

An instant more the haughty head was raised, a hard, cold look had settled upon the face, and it was very pale, but there was no tremor in the voice that said:

"Your friendship is more than I could expect, Preston; but listen to my plans. You know that there is to be war between this country and Mexico, also that in South American waters there are a number of coast pirates! Well, the Government permitted the arming of my yacht for self-protection when we sailed South, and there was no limit to the time, hence I can go to England, fully arm and equip her, and obtain a requisite crew, with which I can return to American waters and act as a privateer. You know the speed of the *Wanderer*, and that the forty men who now compose her crew can be depended upon, and in England we can increase her complement of men to twenty more. I will call Guy Rivers and Oscar Minturn into the cabin, explaining to them that I cannot go home yet awhile, upon account of serious trouble there, and ask them to join in the expedition."

"They will go with you, Claude, without a word."

"I am glad to hear you say so; call them down."

The two officers were called to the cabin, and upon Claude making known to them as much as was necessary of his plans, they eagerly coincided with him, for they were young, had both served as midshipmen in the United States navy, and eager for anything in which there was fun and adventure.

They had too much tact to ask the cause of their commander's, and friend's, changed plans, but frankly extended their hands in token of their friendship for him.

"Sincerely do I thank you, my friends, for this proof of esteem for me, and now that our plans are satisfactorily arranged among ourselves, we will go upon deck, and I will have a conversation with the men."

The four officers then ascended to the deck, when Claude called out to Pierre:

"Boatswain, pipe all hands up and send them aft. I wish to have a little talk with them."

"Ay, ay, captain," and the shrill whistle of the boatswain pierced the air far out over the waters.

The *Wanderer* was bounding along at a lively rate, under mainsail, foresail, jib and maintopsail, and had run the land out of sight, except the far-off glimmer of a light-house up the coast above the mouth of the river.

Claude stood gazing listlessly across the ocean in the direction of Elgin, his teeth hard set and breast heaving with inward emotion, while Preston May stood near, pitying from his heart the deep sorrow that had fallen upon his friend.

"The men are all here, Claude."

"Ah, Minturn; well," and the rigid face relaxed, a forced look of calm came into the expression, as the young commander turned and saluted his crew.

After a moment's pause, Claude began:

"Men, circumstances of a painful nature prevent my returning to Elgin, and I have decided to offer my yacht and services to the Government to use against the Mexicans, with whom our country is about to go to war. For this purpose I am now going to England, where I will make an addition of twelve men to this crew, arm and equip my vessel thoroughly, and returning to these shores make the *Wanderer* a privateer. Good wages and plenty of prize-money will repay you for the risk you run. If there are any of you who do not wish to accompany me, on my arrival in England I will see that you return safely to your homes. Now I wish to ask if my crew is with me?"

For a moment there was silence; the men glancing from one to the other to discover the determination of each other, and then their voices arose, to a man, in three loud and prolonged cheers for their young commander; three cheers then followed for the other officers, and then three times three for the success of the expedition.

"Men, I thank you," and with these words Claude Alberti left the deck and descended into the cabin, leaving his officers and crew to discuss the brilliant future that was opening for the *Wanderer*.

While the fleet yacht is bounding

O'er the glad waters
Of the deep blue sea,"

I will, in another chapter, return to the old fort in Maine, where I left Alice, alone with the body of her lover, whose bright anticipations of a moment before had been so rudely broken in upon by the arrival of his brother Claude.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN'S LOVE AND HEROISM.

FOR a moment after the departure of Claude from the fort, Alice stood proudly erect in the position she had assumed as she bade him leave

her; but then she turned, and again knelt beside the prostrate form of Henry, crying:

"God in heaven be merciful to me, in this my great sorrow; but perhaps he is not dead!—no! his heart beats! he still lives! Thou art merciful, oh my Heavenly Father!" and the brave girl tore open the vest and shirt to seek the wound.

The ball had entered his right side, and from the wound the blood was slowly ebbing. To take her handkerchief and Henry's, and bind them hard upon the wound, to raise the head into an easier position, and then to mount her horse and dash away, was but the work of a few moments to accomplish.

Rapidly her mare ran along the lonely forest road, her hoofs echoing through the woods with a quick, sharp ring, and it was not long before Alice drew rein by the stone steps of the mansion.

The sound of her horse's hoofs had been heard, and General Alberti and three or four servants met her at the door.

"Quick, father! Henry has met with an accident!—Ned, go for Dr. Haines!—Robert, get the carriage! Henry is down at the old fort on the cliff! For God's sake, make haste, all of you!"

And without another word Alice wheeled her horse and rode off at the same wild gait in which she had come.

General Alberti turned pale with dread at her words, but his orders were calmly and quickly given, and it was a very few moments after the maiden's departure before he drove after her in his carriage, accompanied by two servants.

Upon arriving at the fort they found Alice kneeling beside the form of Henry, her face as pale as that of the wounded man; but her hand was tightly pressed upon the wounded side, from which the blood still continued to flow.

The horses also seemed to feel that some great harm had been done, for they were standing quietly near, forgetful of the luxurious grass at their feet.

Tenderly the wounded man was raised and placed in the carriage, General Alberti and Alice supporting the form, and as the coachman drew rein at the door of the mansion, they were met by the neighborhood physician, who had been so quickly summoned by Alice's orders.

An hour passed in the greatest suspense, and then the white, scared face of Alice appeared at the door of Henry's room, and the trembling voice asked:

"Doctor, will he die?"

"I think not, Miss Alice; I have extracted the ball, which was fired from a pistol, I perceive, and though it has made a dangerous and painful wound, it is not necessarily fatal. He must receive careful nursing."

"I will be with him night and day. I thank you for your kind words of comfort. Where is my guardian?"

"With Henry, who is still unconscious; how did the affair occur, Miss Alice?"

The pale face of the maiden flushed, and conflicting emotions passed through her mind. Would it be right for her to shield Claude, at the expense of falsehood, or to tell the whole truth? No; she could not do that; she had noticed, as she drove away from the fort, holding Henry's head in her lap, that the Wanderer was far away, fleeing seaward with all sail set, so she would pretend ignorance of the one who had fired the shot.

Like lightning these thoughts flashed through her mind, and having determined upon what course to pursue, she answered:

"Doctor, I can hardly tell how it occurred, it was so sudden. Henry and myself were seated in the fort, looking out upon the ocean, when a man suddenly appeared before us, and before Henry could say a word, or attempt to defend himself, he was fired upon, and fell, as I believed, dead. The man then turned and hastily left."

"It is strange; I did not believe he had an enemy in the country," and with that the good doctor turned and reentered the room of his patient.

Calling a servant, Alice told him to inform General Alberti that she would speak with him, in his study, and resorting thither, she was soon joined by her guardian, who said, as he closed the door:

"Alice, I felt by your manner that there was some mystery connected with the wounding of my son, which you were anxious to avoid speaking of before the doctor and the servants."

"Yes, my dear guardian, there is a mystery, a painful one, connected with Henry's wound, and God be praised that, as the doctor says, there is hope for his recovery, that the blow has not been worse."

"We have indeed much to be thankful for in the knowledge that the wound is not fatal. My poor, poor boy. I did not believe he had an enemy in the world," and the old gentleman was almost overcome with emotion.

"But tell me, Alice," he continued, "who fired upon my boy? Oh, that Claude were here to track his would-be assassin!"

"Claude has been here, father."

"Claude here? where, Alice, when?"

"Father, control yourself, and I will tell you all. Calm yourself, for the severest part of the sorrow is yet to come. Listen!" and slowly, but in a firm voice, Alice began the recital of her sad story, and told her guardian all with which the reader has been made acquainted.

To depict the anguish that pierced the heart of General Alberti, the kind and affectionate father, upon learning the sad truth, is impossible, and it was long before he could sufficiently gain composure to talk with Alice regarding the keeping of the whole affair a secret.

"Claude has doubtless sailed for some foreign land, believing he has killed his brother, and as his crew is devoted to him they will follow him to the ends of the earth. He will assuredly not tell any one of his mad act. You are certain no one was with him, Alice?"

"Yes, sir, he was alone, to the best of my belief, and I afterward saw the yacht flying to sea."

"Better, far better so; he will keep the secret well locked in his own bosom, until he learns that his brother is not dead, for with God's help, Henry will yet live; and then I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, that my son will not be taken from me, and by his brother's hand!" and the old general again buried his face in his hands, while the fervent "Amen!" of Alice proved how sincerely she echoed the prayer.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST COMBAT.

It was toward the evening of the third day after leaving America, and while the yacht Wanderer was bowling along at ten knots an hour, that the lookout suddenly cried:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay!" was Claude's reply from the deck.

"There are two vessels, sir, lying alongside; I cannot yet make out their rig," came the answer from the lookout; while Claude, having sent for his glass, ascended the rigging and gazed for some moments at the distant vessels, after which he returned hurriedly to the deck.

"Crowd on sail, Minturn; Rivers, get the men ready for quarters, for, if I mistake not, one of those vessels carries the Mexican flag, and is armed, while the other is an American packet ship."

All was at once excitement on the schooner; top-sails were shaken out, a reef let out of the main-sail, and the men prepared to take their stand at the guns.

"You do not believe that a Mexican war-vessel has already had the audacity to overhaul a ship of our merchant service, Claude?" asked Preston May, joining his commander on deck.

"The Mexicans have the impudence to do anything, Preston; when we left New York hostilities were in a manner commencing, and this Mexican has evidently been lying in Halifax harbor, and overhauled the ship soon after her departure from there. At least such is my opinion."

"You are doubtless right; ho! aloft there!" called out Preston.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What do you make them out now?"

"A long rakish-looking craft, flying the Mexican flag, and carrying six guns, sir; the other is a merchantman, and the Mexican is robbing her."

A yell of triumph broke from the crew of the Wanderer at the answer of the lookout, for they felt that they were to be soon engaged in trying their strength with the impudent Mexican.

"Take another careful look, and then come to the deck, sir," called Claude, and then turning to his officers he rapidly gave his orders to prepare for battle.

"You intend to fight, then, do you, Claude?" asked Preston May.

"By all means. I fly my country's flag, am armed, and have caught a vessel of a strange nation plundering one of our merchantmen, and to the best ability of this yacht and crew I intend to make battle," answered the young commander, while his pale face lit up with the fire of enthusiasm.

The crew heard the reply of their captain, and again a loud cheer came from them.

So busily engaged had been the crews of the two vessels in their own affairs, that it was evident, until the ringing cheers floated to them across the ocean, that they had not observed the rapid approach of the Wanderer, which was now not more than a mile distant, and before a free wind coming down with great speed.

In an instant the greatest confusion prevailed upon the two vessels. Men were seen running hither and thither, the long roll of the drum beating to quarters was heard, and the two vessels drifted apart, the lines that bound them having been severed.

It was evident that the Mexicans had been taken by surprise, but loth to lose their prize, and observing the slight proportions of their antagonist, were determined to give battle.

The Wanderer was now near enough to discern the nature of her opponent, which was one of those low, dark, rakish schooners so

common upon the Mexican coast some years ago; and also to discover that she carried six guns, and about sixty men.

Had she been twice the size, Claude would not have hesitated in giving her battle; for the fiery ordeal of suffering through which he had passed, the thought that he had lost the woman whom of all else in the world he loved most, and that his brother had been slain by his hand—these thoughts, added to his daring nature, made him reckless, and the thought of not attacking the Mexican did not for an instant enter his mind.

"Put her under easy-handling sail, Preston, and then see that every man is at his post," he said, while he eagerly watched the Mexican through his glass.

"Pierre, are you ready with your bow-gun there?"

"All ready, sir," was the cheery response from the seaman.

"Let her have it, then," and ere the words had died from his lips the loud boom of the gun was heard, the rush of the solid shot, and the crash of timbers as it buried itself in the mainmast of the Mexican schooner, causing her to shiver from bow to stern.

A yell from the yachtsmen proved their joy at the successful shot, and a hoot of derision followed, as an iron hail from the Mexican swept far above their heads.

"Luff a little, helmsman!" came the quiet order from the young commander.

"Luff it is, sir!"

"Now, Rivers, give her your broadside."

"Ay, ay, Claude," and again the Wanderer's iron cards were presented to the Mexican, but this time with less effect than before, as a lurch of the vessel had destroyed the aim of the gunners.

"Keep it up lively, men. Run alongside the Mexican, helmsman," and on bounded the little vessel to grapple with her antagonist.

The merchant vessel had drifted some distance away, and her crew were grouped together anxiously watching the result of the combat; but seeing that it was the intention of the yacht to board the Mexican, and observing the inferiority in numbers of the yachtsmen, the captain of the ship called out:

"Now is our time to lend a hand to those daring fellows, and avenge ourselves; here, men, a dozen of you come with me in my gig, and we'll join in the sport."

Willingly the men obeyed their old captain, and hastily arming themselves with axes, knives and pistols, they sprang into the boat, and were followed by their commander.

"Hold, captain, I will accompany you," called out an elderly gentleman from the deck, at the same time making an effort to reach the boat.

"No, Mr. Lyndon, you must not go; some accident might befall you, and your daughter would never forgive me! Remain and take care of the ship, and if I never return, you will tell my wife and children I died doing my duty. Shove off, men, and pull with a will," and the boat left the ship, followed by the cheers of those who remained on board.

In the mean time the Wanderer had drawn near to the Mexican vessel, which though disabled by the firing from the yacht was rapidly replying with her guns, but with little effect.

"Stand by, men, to board!" was the ringing order of Claude, as with pistol in one hand, and cutlass in the other, he stood ready to spring aboard the Mexican vessel.

"Bring her up, Pierre, and lay her nose over the Mexican's quarter; there, that was well done; follow me, men!" and with a bound the gallant young yachtsman was upon the deck of the stranger, followed by Preston May and a dozen of his men.

But the sea was rough, and with a crash the bowsprit of the schooner gave way, and the two vessels were parted, leaving the captain and his handful of followers to contend against the overwhelming number of his enemies.

CHAPTER VI.

A MERCHANTMAN'S DAUGHTER.

WHEN Claude Alberti was left with a few of his men upon the deck of the Mexican, it certainly looked gloomy for the Americans, as the yacht became unmanageable from the loss of her bowsprit.

Nothing daunted, however, the brave yachtsmen fought with the desperate courage of those who fight for their lives, and step by step began to press their swarthy foes back toward the stern of their vessel.

"At them, my brave fellows! Never say die!" and the command of Captain Alberti caused the men to renew the attack with vigor.

"The deuce! what's this?" exclaimed Preston May, as a tall figure, armed with an ax, followed by a dozen men, came clambering over the starboard side of the vessel.

"Give it to them, captain! We'll help you pay the debt," and the captain of the merchantman and his bold followers joined Claude in the attack upon the Mexicans.

"Thank you, sir! You are just in time to be

of service to us. Hal there is Rivers and his crew coming over the stern. We have you now, my hearties! On, men, on!"

Though still outnumbering their antagonists, the Mexicans were driven from one end of their ship to the other, and a few moments after the arrival of the merchant captain and Guy Rivers with their men a cry for quarter was heard.

"Hold, men! Strike down no man who begs for mercy," cried Claude; and seeing that their lives were to be spared, the Mexicans threw down their arms and surrendered their vessel to the Americans.

"This has been a hard struggle, Preston. How many of our brave boys have fallen?" asked Claude of his lieutenant, after the fighting had ceased.

"Two killed, and half a dozen slightly wounded, among our crew, sir; but the captain and one of the seamen of the merchantman are killed," announced Pierre, the quartermaster, stepping forward.

"I am very sorry for that, for they served us a good turn in the fight. Now that we have whipped these fellows, what are we to do with them?"

"That is a conundrum, Claude. Turn them adrift again, I suppose," said Rivers, stepping forward, and at the same time binding his handkerchief around a slight wound upon his arm.

"I think you are right; we will have to let them go, and escort the merchantman back to port. Where is your commander?" he called out in Spanish to one of the Mexicans.

"You killed him, sir, with your cutlass when you first came aboard," answered the man, sullenly.

"Well, your next officer?"

"That officer shot him through the head," returned the seaman, pointing to Preston May.

"Oh, the deuce! Then I have done mankind some service, for the fellow I shot was Satan himself," laughingly responded the lieutenant, who understood Spanish.

"I am the third officer, and now in command, sir. What would you?" replied a man, dressed in a gay uniform, and speaking in good English.

Claude looked at the person before him, and the admiration he felt for the stranger's appearance shone upon his face.

Tall, of a slender, graceful figure, with black hair and eyes, a dark mustache, beneath which a pearl-like set of teeth glistened as he spoke, and an olive-tinted skin, the Mexican lieutenant was indeed one who would command attention anywhere, and as he spoke his tones were soft and winning.

Through the fight Claude and Preston had both noticed this officer, urging on his men with coolness and daring, and they felt a respect for his bravery, and when the yachtsman replied his voice was kind, and his words free from all exultation.

"Your men having surrendered, lieutenant, I have now only to arrange with you a few preliminaries and leave you to continue on your course. My motive for attacking you I suppose you feel was sufficient. I saw one of our merchant vessels held in durance vile by an armed vessel flying the flag of Mexico, with which country my own Government is, or will soon be, at war. To release that vessel and uphold the honor of the flag, I attacked you; but having done both, you are now at liberty to continue upon your way. I see that you have suffered, yourself, by a wound in the arm, and your men have lost heavily, both in killed and wounded. Can we be of any service to you?"

"I thank you, captain, for your kindness. My wound is slight, a mere saber-thrust given me by this gentleman here," pointing to Preston, who replied:

"Why, what a bloodthirsty wretch I must be! I assure you, lieutenant, I did not intend to wound you."

"No; the blow was aimed at my life. I parried it, and it pierced my arm; you are a fine swordsman, sir. But to continue; my men who are unhurt can look after the dead and wounded. I regret this affair, captain, from first to last. I urged Commander Zona and the first officer against plundering on the high seas an American merchantman, until we had first received orders from our Government; but was overruled, and hence could only do my duty."

"There is another of our vessels watching off Portland for this same ship, so when you part company with us you had better convoy her into port."

"I thank you sincerely, lieutenant, and if it ever be in my power to return this kindness, rest assured I shall gladly do so."

"My name is Adrian Vesta, a lieutenant in the Mexican navy. Should the fortunes of war ever throw yourself or your officers and myself together again, remember I shall do all in my power to reciprocate the kindness now shown me in setting my vessel and crew at liberty."

A few more words of conversation, and collecting the yacht's and the ship's dead and wounded, Claude and his men returned to the Wanderer, where they found Minturn rapidly

repairing the damages the schooner had sustained in the combat.

Ordering his cutter, Claude, accompanied by Preston, then rowed to the merchantman, whither the boat of the ship had already preceded him, carrying the dead bodies of the captain and seaman.

As the young officers sprung upon the ship's deck a sad sight met their gaze. The two men who had been slain were lying upon the deck, while the seamen were grouped sorrowfully around.

At the head of the group stood two personages, who, at a glance, were seen to be of distinguished presence.

One was an elderly gentleman, with white flowing hair and a heavy iron-gray mustache, while, leaning upon his arm was a maiden of rare loveliness both in face and form.

Raising his cap, with an air of gallantry, Claude stepped forward, and bowed before the lady and gentleman, saying:

"I had no idea that such scenes of carnage were witnessed by womanly eyes. I trust, mademoiselle, you have recovered from the fright you must have received during the combat."

The blue, languid eyes of the maiden were raised, and looked full into the stern, handsome face before her, and the color tinged her pale cheek as she met the gaze of the dark, fascinating eyes that turned upon her.

Her voice was musical and full as she replied:

"I believe I have recovered from my fright, thank you, sir. Oh! we have so much to thank you and your brave men for. It was noble of you, but very daring, to attack a vessel in every way your superior."

"Not our superior, lady, for we conquered her," answered Claude, smiling slightly.

"True, sir; but your superior in size, and the number of guns and men, my daughter means," returned the gentleman upon whose arm the maiden rested, and then he continued: "Permit me, sir, with my daughter, to thank you for all you have done for us. In a few words I will explain my position here: I am a merchant of Baltimore, and this vessel, the Nellie Lyndon, named after my little girl here, is my own, being one of a line of packet-ships I have plying between Halifax and Portland. We had been visiting some friends in Halifax, and were on our way to Portland, where I have business calling me, when that piratical Mexican overhauled us, and had it not been for your timely arrival, I know not what would have been the result, as we were powerless."

"I trust your ship has received no damage, Mr. Lyndon."

"None to the vessel, but we have lost our captain, poor fellow, and a good seaman."

"Then you had best order the mate to get at once under way; the Mexican will not follow you again."

"You are very kind, captain— Pardon me, I neither know the name of yourself, or that of your vessel," said Mr. Lyndon, interrogatively.

"It matters not, sir; we are mere amateur sailors, not having won a name yet," and as Claude replied a flush came into his pale face, at having, for the first time in his life, to disown his name, and as he caught the earnest eyes of Nellie Lyndon fixed inquiringly upon him, a bitter look came upon his frank countenance, which in an instant changed again to one of such deep sadness that it touched the young girl to the heart, and she sighed unconsciously as she felt that some great sorrow rested upon the life of the handsome and fascinating man before her.

"Pardon me! It matters not who you are, we are still indebted to you far more than we can ever repay. Can I not offer you some refreshments, gentlemen?" returned Mr. Lyndon, half hurt at Claude's refusal to give either his name, or that of his vessel.

"No, thanks; we must return at once to our schooner. Permit me to bid you good-evening, and to wish you *bon voyage*," and raising his cap, the young commander again bowed low to Nellie Lyndon, and followed by Preston May, who seemed in no hurry to tear himself from the presence of the beautiful maiden, he entered his cutter, and was rowed rapidly back to the Wanderer.

By the time they had reached the yacht, night had curtailed the sea in darkness, and the black hull and taper spars of the Mexican were no longer visible, but the sound of hammers was heard across the water, that proved she was repairing the damages she had sustained.

As Claude stepped on deck, he said to Minturn:

"Oscar, when the merchantman gets under way, I wish you to keep her in sight; first on one quarter, then on the other; but do not lose her in the darkness, for we must guard her until she reaches Portland in safety."

"Very well, Claude," answered the lieutenant, and half an hour after, while the Nellie Lyndon was dashing the spray from her bows, under a full spread of canvas, the mischievous-looking little yacht was following in her wake, with just sail enough drawing to prevent her losing sight of her in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPECTER YACHT.

AFTER the departure of Claude from the ship, Mr. Lyndon went forward to see the mate in regard to at once continuing on their course, while his daughter Nellie stood upon the stern of the vessel and listlessly watched the returning boat of the yacht.

"Who can he be, I wonder? If he was regularly in the service of his country he would be only too glad to have his own and his vessel's name known, for his daring act. No, there is some hidden cause for his manner in this: the bitter look, and the unutterable sadness that spread over his face, when father asked his name, told me that there is some dark secret connected with his life; but his face is too noble for him to have been guilty of crime;" and thus mused the maiden until the large ship began to move through the water, and she was joined by her father.

"Well, Nellie, what do you make out of that strange but daring and handsome young captain?"

"I was just thinking of him, father, but cannot arrive at any conclusion."

"Doubtless some gay young sprig, who has gotten a bold crew of congenial fellows around him, to prey upon Mexican commerce and wealthy grandees during the war; but whoever he is, he has saved me some two hundred thousand dollars, besides having perhaps done me a greater favor in preventing personal violence to you, for I liked not the tone of those Mexicans."

The young girl shuddered, and then replied:

"It is all over now, father, and I see that the yacht is setting sail and steering seaward."

"By George, you are right. Where can she be going? Anyhow, the Mexican is done for, as far as following us is concerned, and in three days we will arrive in Portland harbor, *Deo volente*! But come, my daughter, you need rest after the fatigue and excitement through which you have passed," and offering his arm, the two descended to the cabin.

It was late at night, and Mr. Lyndon was seated at the cabin table looking over some papers, when the mate, who had taken the place of the captain, entered and said:

"Pardon me for disturbing you, sir, but I came to report a strange sail that has been hovering about us for the past five hours. Will you come upon deck and look at her, sir?"

Seizing his cap, Mr. Lyndon accompanied the mate to the deck, but nowhere could be seen the strange sail.

"She was first upon our starboard and then on our port quarter, sir; then she was in our wake."

"How was she rigged, Mr. Ellis?"

"She was a schooner rig, sir, or at least I thought so, for she was now under bare poles, it looked like, and then under full sail."

For two hours Mr. Lyndon remained upon deck, and was then about to go below, when from the mast-head came the cry:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" called out both Mr. Lyndon and the mate.

"Two points off our weather bow."

"What do you make her out?"

"She is covered with canvas, and I believe is the same schooner that has haunted us all night. She glides over the water like a specter," returned the sailor at the mast-head.

"It is very strange. Can it not be the American schooner that rescued us, Mr. Ellis?"

"No, sir; she started off on a northerly course; besides, she housed her topmasts before we lost sight of her stern," answered the mate.

"Mr. Ellis, the Nellie Lyndon is a very fast sailer; there is a ten-knot breeze blowing, and it is freshening; suppose you crowd on all sail and overhaul that strange craft and discover what she is?"

"Well, sir, that is my idea. Bo'sen Bob, pipe all hands to make sail."

"Ay, ay, sir," but all the men were on deck, for after the adventures of the day, and the knowledge that a strange sail had been hovering around them all night, none of them felt like sleep.

Under every stitch of canvas that would draw, the Nellie Lyndon rushed at a terrific rate through the waters, leaving a foaming track astern; but after an hour's test of her sailing qualities, it was found that the "Specter Yacht," as the seamen called her, was rapidly running away from them, and in half an hour more she had faded from sight in the distance.

"It's no use, Mr. Ellis," said old Bob, the boatswain, "trying to overhaul that craft, although I've seen the Nellie show a clean pair of heels to many a fast sailer; but that schooner that helped us out to-day was a queer craft. I tell you, she came upon us so sudden like, and no one see'd whar from; then look how those devils fought, headed by their Spanish-looking captain. Then none of 'em had a word to say, 'cept their capt'in, and he spoke mighty little; none of the seamen knew the name of their schooner, and the boats had no name upon 'em; then, ag'in, they was all of 'em young fellows,

and, I tell you, I don't like the looks of things," and old Bob walked away slowly, still muttering to himself.

A sleepless night was passed by those on board the Nellie Lyndon, and when the day broke, and the sun arose bright and beautiful, the "Specter Yacht" could nowhere be seen, and although it relieved the fears of the sailors for the while, it but added to their belief that there was something supernatural about her.

The night following was cloudy and threatening, and under reduced sail the Nellie Lyndon struggled through the waves. "Four bells" had just struck when the helmsman, glancing astern for an instant, called out, in a startled voice, "Sail ho!"

His voice was heard by all on deck, and by Mr. Lyndon and Nellie in the cabin.

Instantly there was considerable commotion, and, upon glancing astern, all caught sight of the strange sail, a large schooner, gliding along like the wind, even in the rough sea that was running, and from deck to topmast covered with sail.

Rapidly she gained upon the ship, and Mr. Ellis at once ordered more sail made; but, with that addition, the schooner still came on.

"Will she bear any more, Mr. Ellis?" anxiously asked Mr. Lyndon, glancing at his daughter, and then at the stranger, as if he feared she might be another Mexican.

"I might spread another sheet, sir; but that craft will overhaul us."

More sail was crowded on, and in watching it set, those unemployed upon the ship had for the moment forgotten to note the approach of the schooner.

"She is gone!" suddenly called out Nellie Lyndon, when she next looked for the schooner.

All eyes glanced over the ocean, but nowhere could be seen a trace of the strange sail.

"She does seem like a specter, Mr. Ellis," remarked Mr. Lyndon.

"I can't make her out, sir," was the reply of the mate, who was sorely troubled in his mind regarding the queer maneuvers of the schooner.

The night passed away, and another day, dark and stormy, ushered in the darkness again, and yet no other sight had been obtained of the strange sail.

"She evidently foundered, sir, carrying the amount of canvas she did in that gale last night; and it served her right," was the decision of the mate, and in the former opinion Mr. Lyndon and Nellie acquiesced, but the superstitious sailors would not believe but that she still floated.

As night came on the threatening storm broke in fury upon the devoted ship, and the sailors had sufficient to do to attend to their duties, without looking for the Specter Yacht.

Wrapped in an oilcloth, and muffled up, Nellie had gone upon deck with her father, refusing to remain in the cabin.

Standing near the wheel, she was clinging closely to her father, when she suddenly cried out:

"Father, father! look there!"

All glanced in the direction she pointed astern, and there, coming on under a heavy press of sail, was the Specter Yacht.

"It is the Specter Yacht! No storm will ever sink that craft," uttered old Bob, and one and all of the sailors were of the boatswain's opinion.

At a terrific pace the yacht came on, directly in the wake of the ship, and in half an hour after being first discovered was but a few fathoms astern.

"Port, port your helm, or you will be into us!" yelled Mr. Ellis through his speaking trumpet, and gracefully, as if guided by magic, the yacht came up in the wind, but just sufficient to give her a clear, but dangerously close passage to windward.

Under a cloud of canvas, recklessly carried, the yacht presented a beautiful sight as she came on, with only here and there a dark form upon her decks.

Suddenly, when her sharp bow was even with the stern of the ship, a dark figure sprang into the forward man-ropes, and a deep voice hailed:

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the yacht," answered the mate, while all on board awaited in breathless anxiety the result.

"Have you a coast of Maine pilot aboard?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" returned Mr. Ellis.

"Then put into the mouth of the river twenty miles south of this for protection; there is a Mexican cruiser looking for you," came in the same deep tones that first hailed.

"Thank you, sir; is that the American schooner?" but the Wanderer, for such the reader has discovered the strange sail to be, in obedience to an order from her commander, instantly changed her course, and the question of the mate was borne off on the wind.

Without a moment's hesitancy, Mr. Ellis and Mr. Lyndon determined to follow the advice given them, and two hours after the good ship, under the guidance of a skillful pilot, dropped anchor in the river referred to, and under the

shadow of the old fort that has been so often spoken of in this story.

Although midnight, the ramparts of the old fort were crowded by a motley group of people from the neighborhood, that had been called thither by the loud report of guns that were borne to them on the wind from the ocean.

Fearing a vessel was coming ashore, all the neighboring fishermen and farmers had gathered at the fort to render assistance to those in distress, and upon their arrival had stood and watched the distant flashes far out upon the ocean, and listened to the reverberations of the guns, as the sound rolled up the river and along the coast.

Among those that had driven to the scene were General Alberti and Alice Gray, who, leaving Henry in the care of competent nurses, had gone thither to aid in succoring other sufferers.

They had watched the entrance of the Nellie Lyndon into the mouth of the river, and General Alberti had sent two fishermen to board her and ask if any service could be rendered to her passengers and crew, and also to request the captain to ascend to the fort.

The Nellie Lyndon had hardly dropped anchor in the quiet water, when the sound of the guns at sea were heard by those on board, for before, having been surrounded by the roaring tempest, they had not been noticed.

The fishermen boarded the ship as soon as it anchored, and explained their mission, when Mr. Lyndon at once expressed his determination to accompany them.

"Can I go also, father?" asked Nellie.

"It is a horrid night, my daughter, but no worse than you have been exposed to when at sea; yes, come!"

After a toilsome climb up the steep pathway, Mr. Lyndon, Nellie and the mate reached the fort, and were immediately welcomed by General Alberti and Alice.

"We were brought hither, sir," explained General Alberti, to Mr. Lyndon, "by the sound of minute-guns at sea, and upon our dangerous coast we must be ever ready to aid those in distress."

"Those are not minute-guns, sir," answered Mr. Lyndon.

"Not minute-guns! what mean you? they are fired irregularly, I admit, but that may be for want of proper handling," returned General Alberti.

"Look, sir! do you observe that flash? there! and that one? see, they are a long distance apart! That is a sea combat, sir, between a Mexican war-vessel and one of the most daring little American cruisers I ever knew."

The words of Mr. Lyndon created the wildest sensation, and the group of people, ladies and all, crowded around him, anxious to hear more.

Mr. Lyndon then detailed the account of the capture and rescue of his vessel, the strange sail that had hovered near them each night following, the overtaking of the ship by the schooner, and the advice given them that had caused them to put into the river for protection, and then the disappearance of the schooner.

"How long has the firing been continued?" he asked, after finishing his narrative.

"Fully an hour, sir. Shortly after our arrival here, half an hour since, we noticed your vessel coming in. You have had a narrow escape, sir, and I congratulate yourself and daughter upon your safety, and trust that you will both do me the honor to return with us to my mansion. My ward here will do all she can to render your daughter comfortable."

Alice added her entreaties, and after a moment's hesitation Mr. Lyndon and Nellie accepted the invitation to return with their newfound friends to Elgin.

The firing in the meanwhile had become more sharp and rapid, and the group at the fort stood in silence listening to the combined roar of the storm and the battling of man with his fellow-man.

Between General Alberti and Alice a singular look had passed when Mr. Lyndon had described the strange schooner and her crew, and they felt that it could be none other than the Wanderer.

Feelings of suspense filled their hearts as they listened, and trembled at the report of the guns, and inwardly they prayed that Claude would be spared through the danger into which they knew his recklessness had plunged him.

Flash after flash lit up the ocean, boom after boom of the cannon rolled over the waters, and still the combat continued, and momentarily became more terrific, and it was an awful sight to those standing amid the ruins of a fort, which in ages gone by had hurled from its own guns the death-dealing bolts upon its adversaries, to listen to the thunders of war that broke again the stillness of the timeworn and forgotten fortress.

With clasped hands and tearful eyes, many a fair face was raised heavenward, in prayer for the protection of her country's defenders, and the memory of the handsome and daring commander of the schooner came vividly before Nellie Lyndon, and the sweet mouth uttered

an earnest prayer to the God of battles for his safety.

A group of seamen had come up from the ship below, and joined the party on the cliff, and among them was the boatswain, Bob.

"Look yonder, Mr. Lyndon, see the flashes is getting closer; that devil of a young capt'in is goin' to board that Mexican, even in this storm, as my name is Boatswain Bob."

"You are right, Bob, I believe," said Mr. Lyndon; "what do you think, Mr. Ellis?"

"He's got the daring to do anything, sir; but if they come together a night like this they will both go down."

"Not that schooner, sir; she is not to be sunk by human hands," put in old Bob, and his shipmates readily assented.

"Great God! what is that?" and as General Alberti spoke a cry of horror went up from all present.

Earth, sea and sky were lit up for an instant with the brilliancy of noonday, a lurid glare extending over all, a trembling of the cliff to its foundation, and a crash, a roar, a sound so deep and appalling, followed by a silence so fearful, a darkness tangible, struck terror into the hearts of every one gathered in the fortress.

"See! see! the Specter Yacht!" and old Bob's voice broke the silence, and all eyes looking seaward beheld for an instant a long, low schooner, enveloped in a blue, spectral light, and scudding along under bare poles, with only her jibs set, toward the open sea.

"It is, it is the yacht," in one voice, almost, cried the seaman and Mr. Lyndon.

"Victorious again, and the Mexican blown to perdition," shouted Mr. Ellis, and then he continued:

"Three rousing cheers, boys, for the Specter Yacht and her daring crew."

A cheer, loud and long, rose above the fury of the storm, from all present, and was caught up and repeated by those who remained upon the ship below.

"The Mexican has met an awful doom, blown into atoms in the twinkling of an eye," remarked Mr. Lyndon, but while there was great rejoicing among those present at the victory of the American cruiser, two hearts beat in sad unison together, when they thought that he, the wanderer, the intended fratricide, might then be lying dead or wounded upon the deck of his victorious vessel.

Recovering himself by a great effort from the fit of gloom that was coming upon him, General Alberti ushered Mr. Lyndon and Nellie into the carriage, and the party drove rapidly away toward Elgin, while the others present also dispersed, leaving the fortress to its former loneliness.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BATTLE IN A STORM.

THE helmsman at the wheel of the Wanderer faithfully obeyed the instructions of the officer of the deck, to keep the Nellie Lyndon in sight during the night, and by day to stand upon a course that would keep her topmasts in view of the lookout at the fore-top, who had orders never to lose sight of the vessel.

This accounts for the strange hovering of the yacht near the ship, which so excited the superstition of the sailors, and when, the second night, she was bowling along in the wake of the Nellie Lyndon, and suddenly disappeared, it was on account of a reputed sail in sight, which caused Claude to immediately order all sail taken in, and the vessel to be left under bare poles, hoping that by this means he might elude the vigilance of the Mexican craft, if it proved to be that vessel, and thus come upon her un-awares.

But the reported sail proved to be only a fishing-boat making with all haste for the coast, and it was not until the following night that the yacht again overtook the ship.

One of the seamen had reported to Pierre that the other Mexican boat, referred to by Lieutenant Vesta, carried eighty men and seven guns, and when the quartermaster informed Claude of the fact, he at once saw his inability to cope with so formidable an antagonist, so therefore determined to warn the ship to put into the mouth of the river for safety, feeling assured that the Mexican was somewhere near looking for her.

How he overhauled the Nellie Lyndon and informed her crew of their danger is well known, and having accomplished this, the yacht crept up to windward, and by her rapid sailing qualities passed ahead of the ship, and soon left her some distance astern.

Passing the entrance, through the dangerous shoals, to the safe harborage in the mouth of the river, Claude was about to stand out to sea again, and watch if the ship had followed his advice.

The tall masts of the Nellie Lyndon had just been reported in sight, and that she was bearing away for the entrance through the islands, when Preston May suddenly called out: "By Jove! yonder is the Mexican!" and the long black hull and towering spars of a three-masted schooner, standing down toward them under closely-reefed sails, was discernible to all eyes.

"To your guns, men! clear away for action," and the voice of the young commander was calm and clear as he gave the order.

Quickly and in silence the men obeyed, and in five minutes after the discovery of the Mexican, the Wanderer and her crew were stripped for the fight.

Slowly the two vessels approached each other, and by a flash of lightning Claude saw that the Mexicans were at their guns, and also prepared for the fray.

"She is much larger than the other one, Preston," said Claude to his lieutenant, who was standing at his side.

"Yes, and seems better prepared for us."

"It would be madness to grapple with her, I admit; but we can play ball with each other for a while, and I believe the superior qualities of the Wanderer will greatly give us the advantage," answered Claude.

"I will hail her, in a moment," he continued, and then through his silver speaking trumpet he hailed in Spanish: "Schooner ahoy! what schooner is that?"

A moment's silence, and the reply came, also in Spanish:

"The Mexican cruiser Zanzibar! What schooner is that?"

"Answer with your gun, Pierre," returned Claude, in English, and the "Forecastle Pet," as the thirty pounder pivot-gun was called, poured forth its angry voice, startling the Mexicans, and far away in the peaceful homes on the land, sending a shudder of anxiety to those who heard it, and deemed it a signal of distress from some poor ship driving helplessly upon the shore.

The Mexicans replied, and for a long while the two brave schooners battled with the angry waves and hurled their iron hail upon each other.

The sea was running too high, however, and the wind whistling too strong, for constant and rapid action between them, and fearing a collision they wisely kept at a distance and exchanged their shots; but at length, becoming tired out with this style of fighting, for pitching as they were they could not train their guns upon the Mexican, Claude determined to edge nearer to his antagonist and give him the benefit of a broadside, for as the bow and stern guns of the schooner were pivots, it gave her the advantage of these guns to a side.

"Helmsman, bring her up two points, and keep her steady. Rivers, keep her only under her jibs, to steady her. Now, Preston, pour in your broadside!"

The loud report of the guns was drowned in the deafening explosion that followed, for a shot from the "Forecastle Pet" had gone crashing into the magazine of the Mexican schooner; a sheet of flame, a volume of sulphurous smoke, a raising of the fire-torn decks, and the ill-fated vessel was blown into a thousand atoms.

"God in heaven! is not that a fearful sight?" and the young commander covered his eyes with his hands to hide the scene from his vision.

An instant only this weakness, and then his voice was as firm as ever.

"Keep a bright lookout around, boys, some poor wretch may yet be saved!"

"Claude, see yonder. Look at the old fort," cried Preston May, pointing landward with his hand.

"I see; it is crowded with people, and they have built a bright fire. There may be some there, Preston, who know that it has been the Wanderer engaged, and to relieve their anxiety, burn a blue light to show we are yet afloat."

"You are right, Claude, for it will at least show to the ship that went in that we are not food for sharks," and Preston May hastily set the blue light ablaze, for he wished it to be seen by the lovely blue eyes of Nellie Lyndon, and prove to her that the strange schooner and her crew were still safe and bravely battling with the billows.

The schooner had been put away from the coast, as soon as it was evident that no one could be saved from the unfortunate vessel, and was rapidly running seaward when the blaze of the blue light cast its baleful gleam about her.

"Let the men seek rest now, all that are not needed to work the ship. Preston, Pierre has proven to me that we need not go to England to get arms and the munitions of war to refit the Wanderer. Tell the helmsman to put the yacht on a northwesterly course, and then come down into the cabin with Oscar and Guy, and we will talk it over. Here, Pierre, I want you," and Captain Alberti descended into the comfortable and capacious cabin of the yacht, followed by Pierre, and was soon after joined by Preston and his other officers, and there I will leave them in council for awhile, and in another chapter relate the scenes that have transpired at Elgin since the night of the flight of the Wanderer.

CHAPTER IX.

LIFE AT ELGIN MANOR.

THE morning after the night upon which Henry was so unfortunately wounded, proved to the physician in attendance upon him that his patient was more seriously injured than he had first supposed.

It is true he had succeeded in extracting the

ball, but then fever was setting in, and if the patient became delirious, he might so exert himself as to cause hemorrhage that would prove fatal.

His fears were made known to both Alice and General Alberti, who night and day were in constant attendance around the bed of the wounded lover and son.

But a week passed, and though Henry had hovered between life and death, at the end of that time he was slowly improving and confident hopes were entertained of his recovery to perfect health again.

Though conscious he had but once referred to the manner in which he had received his wound, and then only asked Alice, in a feeble voice:

"Where is Claude?"

"He sailed again the night you were wounded," replied his attentive and lovely nurse.

"Did no one from the Wanderer land with Claude, Alice?"

"No one, Henry."

"Thank God," and after this the suffering man seemed content.

At the end of the week it was that the neighborhood had been startled by the guns, which were then believed to be signals of distress, and of the visit of General Alberti and Alice to the scene, and the return of Mr. Lyndon and his daughter Nellie, with them to Elgin, the reader has been made aware.

Upon arriving at the mansion supper was ordered for the guests, and around the board the small party became quite well acquainted, and it was late into the night ere they separated to retire.

For a long time the lovely Nellie tossed restlessly upon her pillow in thinking over the scenes through which she had passed, and in spite of herself the dark sad eyes of Claude would force themselves upon her. At length sweet sleep overcame her, and her memories formed themselves into pleasant dreams, in which the daring young captain rescued her again from some dreadful fate, and in return for which she gave him her hand and heart.

The warm sunshine had penetrated into her chamber ere she awoke, refreshed after her sleep, for Alice would not have the maiden called, and bade the servant let her slumber on undisturbed.

She had nearly completed her toilet when there came a gentle tap at the door, and the sweet voice of Alice asked:

"Can I come in?"

"Certainly, Miss Gray; I fear through your kindness I have been a sad sluggard."

"No, it is only ten o'clock, and breakfast is now ready, and I came to accompany you."

Warm greetings were interchanged by all at breakfast, and Mr. Lyndon willingly accepted the cordial invitation of General Alberti to remain at Elgin while his ship was undergoing necessary repairs, as she had suffered considerably in the hard blow of the past few days.

As the days passed on, the two maidens became more and more attached to each other, and it was with the greatest regret, after a week's stay at Elgin, that they found they must part, for Mr. Ellis had come up from the Nellie Lyndon to report her ready for sea.

Henry had been frequently visited by Mr. Lyndon and the fair Nellie, and sincerely did he also regret that they could not remain longer.

But the packet-ship could not be detained, and with many protestations of love, the maidens bade adieu to each other, in the cabin of the ship, for Alice had gone aboard to see the last she could of her new-found friend.

After an affectionate farewell to Nellie, Alice returned to the shore with her guardian, and ascending the hill to the fort, they stood and watched the rapid progress of the fine ship as she wound her way among the islands out into the broad ocean and turned her prow southward.

With another wave of their handkerchiefs toward the receding vessel, General Alberti and his ward entered their carriage and returned to Elgin.

Thus the days passed away in the lordly mansion, and Henry again was able to move about, but almost a wreck of his former self, for his long struggle with his painful wound had wasted him away almost to a shadow.

Under careful nursing, and the devoted care of Alice and his father, he however began to recuperate, dismissed his physician, and three months from the time of receiving his wound, his strength was returning to him, the old pleasant smile was again on his face, and a quiet contentment rested upon the inmates of Elgin.

No, not contentment, for no other tidings had come from the Wanderer since shortly after the departure of Mr. Lyndon for Portland; he had written from there to say that it was rumored in that city that the Wanderer had become a privateer, and was playing sad havoc among the merchant marine service in the Gulf of Mexico.

This information General Alberti had carried to the different families whose sons formed a

part of Claude's crew, and since then no word had come of the yachtsmen.

Voluntarily, among themselves, the name of Claude was never mentioned in the Elgin home circle, but often in the cold, stormy winter evenings, when silence would rest upon them, the thoughts of all three were far away from the bright fireside, with the absent one, whose happy laugh might never again echo through the old halls.

The "vacant chair" was there still, the pictures he had painted, the books he had loved, all were there, but the dashing, daring boy no longer filled his accustomed place.

The piano in his own sanctum no more thrilled beneath his master touch; his favorite steed stood unused in the stable, his pet spaniel, Gray, wandered listlessly around as if waiting for his master's call.

Such memories would crowd upon the three, in the long winter evenings at Elgin, and cause them to long for the coming of the exile home again; but none would give expression to their thoughts, for the dark act of the rash youth, his madness in striking at his brother's life, were not forgotten.

Yet all hoped for the safety of the sorrowing exile, and prayed that some time in the future the bitter remembrances of the past might be obliterated, and Claude once more become a happy inmate of the home of his boyhood.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAR COUNCIL IN THE WANDERER'S CABIN.

UPON entering the cabin of the yacht Claude threw himself carelessly upon a lounge, which by its beauty and comfortable look invited repose.

Motioning Pierre to a seat upon a divan, Claude touched a little bell upon the table, and in answer to its summons a bright mulatto servant appeared.

"Benedict, bring wine and cigars, and then see that I am not disturbed unless needed upon deck."

"Yes, sir," and the servant disappeared into the next saloon, and soon returned bearing a silver salver upon which was a cigar rack of silver, manufactured as a model of the Wanderer; also decanters of the finest cut glass, containing choice wines.

"Now, Pierre, when my officers come down I wish you to tell them your idea of equipping the yacht with guns and men, and I feel assured they will at once decide with me to go to the East after our arms, and to refit the craft," said Claude to his companion, who was a man of powerful build, being over six feet in height, and possessing a complexion burned brown by long exposure. His eyes were intensely black, as was his hair, which was worn long, falling upon his shoulders, and his dark mustache, curled up at the end, gave him a decidedly foreign look. To glance into his face, a person in danger would readily seek his protection, and when the piercing eyes were brightening with anger there would be few men who would wish to be the cause of exciting his ire.

Of his past history none knew aught aboard the yacht, except Claude, and the men had often wondered at the strange friendship that existed between them, for Pierre had returned with his commander from Europe, and since then they had seldom been separated.

For some moments the two men sat in silence, and then Preston May entered, followed by Oscar Minturn and Guy Rivers.

"How is the Wanderer behaving, Preston?" asked Claude.

"Splendidly; we are making a good offing, and I have given orders to them to stand up the coast."

"That is right; sit down, gentlemen, there are cigars and wine, so make yourselves comfortable and we will have a talk to-night. In fact, I wish to decide thoroughly upon our future movements. Thrown as we were suddenly into the service of our country, we have already gained two signal victories, and in saving the Nellie Lyndon from the clutches of the Mexicans have relieved our consciences from any misgivings we might have had at acting so decidedly without orders. To continue my 'big talk,' as the Indians would call it, I am desirous of winning for this vessel a name that will shine brightly through coming years. We are all of us young, and full of the spirit of adventure, a wide field is opening before us in the war between our country and Mexico. There is no need for ourselves, or our vessel to be known as we are, as she is, for by keeping up a mystery we will render tenfold service, and gain a reputation that will avail us much with the superstitious denizens of Mexico. Now I have a plan to propose to you: You are all aware that Pierre and myself have been for some years intimate friends, and that I know much of his past life, therefore I vouch for his truth in all he may tell you. We have talked over a plan for arming more efficiently and equipping more thoroughly, besides manning with good seamen this vessel, and I am willing to at once turn the prow of the Wanderer toward a distant land and carry out the plan, besides feeling that in so doing we will render a great service to suffering humanity. Now lis-

ten to his story, and then we will decide," and as Claude ceased speaking he nodded to Pierre to begin.

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Pierre. I wish to hear the story, but beforehand decide to follow the lead of my commander," and Preston May's fine face brightened as he spoke.

"And I."

"Count on me, Claude," said both Oscar and Guy in a breath.

"Sincerely do I thank you; now, Pierre, to your story," and in obedience to his commander's request, Pierre commenced his narrative.

CHAPTER XI.

PIERRE'S STORY.

THROWING aside his cigar, Pierre commenced, in a pleasant voice, in which there was just the slightest indication of a foreign accent, as follows:

"I am not aware that, excepting the captain, any of my officers present are acquainted with scenes in my past life, so I shall have to commence my story a long way back to show how I became acquainted with the facts which I am about to relate.

"I am a native of Persia, my mother being the daughter of a wealthy sheik in that country, and my father an American, a gentleman of means, who, while traveling in Persia, saw my mother, and the two having fallen in love with each other, ran away from the country and were married.

"Being disinherited for marrying a foreigner, when he was engaged to an American lady, my father gave up his citizenship in this country, and with his bride returned to the Eastern continent, where he had some moneyed interests in Algiers and Morocco.

"Hearing that the father of my mother had been killed in a combat with the Arabs, he returned to Persia, and there I was born; but the report proved false, my mother was taken prisoner and beheaded, and my father escaped with me only after severe hardships and dangers.

"Returning to Morocco he again entered into business, but the death of my mother wore upon him to such an extent that he became dissipated, and soon after sailed from Algiers, determining to return to America, for he had lost his wealth and was comparatively a poor man.

"Devoted to me, he carried me with him, but the vessel in which we set sail to cross the Mediterranean was attacked by an Algerian corsair, and after a desperate conflict overpowered, and nearly all on board put to death.

"The conspicuous bravery of my father attracted the attention of the corsair chief, and his life was spared, although he had killed a number of the pirates.

"Not to tire you, my father accompanied the pirates to their stronghold, enlisted as one of their number, and five years after became their chief.

"Now it is of this stronghold I would speak, for I know it most thoroughly.

"You are all doubtless aware that in the Atlantic ocean, and to the west of the southern coast of Morocco, there are several groups of small islands, some of which are considered uninhabitable, not on account of their climate, for that is delightful, nor for reason of their seemingly, viewed from the ocean, sterile look; but because there was no approach to their rocky coast that had ever been discovered by explorers and navigators sent for that purpose by the British Government.

"What science had failed to disclose, accident had made known to a few.

"A pirate fleeing from an American man-of-war, had been dismantled by a broadside, and as night came on it saved them from capture, for the frigate could not discover them in the darkness.

"With rudder shot away, and her foremast gone, the corsair barque drifted about at the mercy of the wind and waves, and her crew were suddenly startled by seeing loom up before them the tall, rocky cliffs of an island, which at sunset had seemed many miles away.

"Believing that they would be dashed upon the rocks, every effort was made to avoid the catastrophe, but in vain did they strive to prevent the onward movement of their vessel, and had given themselves up for lost, when the cliff before them presented an opening, through which the current rushed with rapid force.

"On glided the corsair barque, until it passed through the narrow gateway, round a narrow curve in the stream, and into a basin, or large lake where the water was comparatively smooth.

"Here their slight anchors held fast, and the vessel rested upon the quiet bosom of the lake, and in thankfulness for their preservation, the corsairs betook themselves to rest to await the coming day.

"At length daylight broke upon the island, and all aboard the pirate barque were struck dumb with amazement.

"A perfect fairy scene was presented to their wondering eyes, for their vessel was riding quietly at anchor in a lake in size about a square

mile, and to which no outlet or inlet could be discovered.

"Far off, and above them, and around them, circled the white summits of the cliffs, whose ocean-washed sides had presented such a forbidding look to mariners, but which sloped gently down toward the interior to the white shell-lined shore of the inland lake.

"Lofty trees, flowering shrubs, luxuriant undergrowth and rich grasses covered the hills and valleys of the island, and the sweet songs of birds were wafted over the waters, while their brilliant plumage could be seen glittering in the sunlight.

"Speechless with amazement and joy the corsairs gazed upon the scene, and it was a long time before a word was spoken.

"My father commanded that corsair barque, gentlemen, and I was with him, then a little boy of twelve years of age.

"Ordering a boat manned, my father went ashore.

"Far away off upon the ocean we could see the sail of the distant frigate, and it was slowly moving away toward the Straits of Gibraltar, having given up the search for us.

"No sign of the internal beauty of the island could be discovered from the ocean at any point, and vessels would generally give it a wide berth on account of the reefs of rocks that nearly everywhere surrounded it.

"But another strange circumstance connected with the island, was an outlet, winding and deep, like the inlet, and from the outside presenting no sign of an opening, only forbidding rocks.

"And through this channel a strong current rushed, proving that a river, as it was, flowed through the island, dividing it in twain, and forming a basin, or lake in the center, and had we not anchored, our vessel would have floated through the island and into the open sea beyond.

"This island was at once named the 'Corsair's Paradise,' and to-day it is a mere den for smugglers; but all the guns and equipments are there I know, for I visited it some years after, as my father sent me to Europe to be educated, and when I returned long after I found him dead and the place a retreat simply for bold outlaws under Don Pedro.

"Upon the island, however, we can find a hundred good seamen, if they are outlaws, who would be glad to serve with us, and thereby save their necks, I know, and also release the prisoners they have held there in bondage.

"The smuggler chief is in reality the corsair leader, for he is nothing more, and for years has been a cruel sea rover, is a Spaniard, and, as I said, his name is Don Pedro, and he is a perfect fiend.

"He was a lieutenant under my father, and he secretly killed him that he might be in full command, and would have taken my life also, had I not escaped from the island, for I was unwilling to link my fate with crime after my contact with the other world had shown me the heinousness of the cruel life led at Corsair's Paradise.

"This Don Pedro still keeps up his piracies, I know, when he dares put to sea in his old vessel, and he holds as prisoner one whom I particularly would like to see free from his power.

"It is a little girl, whom my father captured with her father and mother upon the high seas.

"Her father died of his wounds, and her mother soon after followed, and the little Adina is now there.

"We may have to do some fighting against the band who still hold the Corsair's Paradise; but we can bring strategy to aid us, for there is an old superstition among the Algerines that we can make of service to us.

"Many years ago there was an English captain who came to the Mediterranean to make his fortune off of pirates.

"His vessel was a beautiful schooner, painted white with snow-white sails, white masts, white guns, and white uniforms, trimmed with gold, and her name was the 'Dare-Devil.'

"The flag of this craft was a red field, with a figure of his Satanic Majesty, tooth, nail and forked tail, which latter appendage was stuck between his legs, like that of a dog when frightened; the figure was painted black upon the red field; another figure in white and facing the devil, was that of a man bearing in his extended hand a flaming sword with which he threatens Satan, while in the other hand he holds a cross, as if daring him to do his worst while he is protected by the sword of justice, upheld by the symbol of religious faith."

"By George, Pierre, we must have that flag by all means; we will scare the Mexican *Diegos* out of their wits with it," said Preston May.

"This vessel, the Dare-Devil," resumed Pierre, "cruised around, playing sad havoc with the corsairs, and hanging, without trial, all that were captured."

"After three years of fearful ravages upon the piratical vessels it sailed away to sea one night in a terrible storm, and has never since been heard of; but the superstition is, that in one hundred years the Dare-Devil was to come again, for none of the corsairs are there hardly but believe that the ship was sailed by a spirit crew, and will never go down."

"Now we can sail to a little seaport on the coast of Morocco, and soon fit out this vessel in a white suit, and then run down to Corsair's Paradise, and entering by night make an impression which I hope will cause all of the wickedest of the pirates to put themselves to death in their fright; the sequel, of fully preparing the Wanderer for her Southern cruise, is easy then. What think you, gentlemen?"

"I have but to repeat my assertion, Pierre: I am ready," said Preston.

"At your service, Claude, and by all means have the Wanderer metamorphosed into the Dare-Devil," said Rivers, while Minturn joined in with:

"I second the motion, and if we don't scare ourselves to death by our ghostly rig, we will drive every Mexican, living upon the coast of Mexico, that catches sight of us, clear into the interior of the country."

"The Dare-Devil, let the Wanderer be then, white uniform, flag and all, and when we reach the coast of Morocco we will baptize her in her new suit. Now it is late, or rather early, for day is breaking, and we had better seek rest. Pierre, I thank you for your kindness. Please consider yourself fourth officer of this vessel," and Claude ascended to the deck, while the other officers, after personally thanking Pierre, and congratulating him upon his promotion, departed to their several state-rooms.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CORSAIR'S PARADISE.

It is night off the coast of Africa, and the rays of the full moon are bathing their tips in the waters of the Atlantic, which are gently rippled by a light wind which is bearing across them a white, airy-looking cloud—that upon nearer approach, takes the outlines of a large and beautiful vessel; a schooner under a cloud of canvas bearing away in a direction southerly of the Canary Islands.

Three months have passed since the reader last saw this same vessel, starting upon her voyage across the Atlantic from the coast of Maine, and so changed is she as to be almost unrecognizable.

The graceful outlines of the yacht still remain, the tall, tapering, and rakish masts are the same, the snow-white and broad spread of canvas are alike, but all else seems changed.

The decks, the hull, the masts, the spars are all white, and moving about like specters upon her decks are the forms of men clad in snow-white uniforms.

The guns and gun-carriages upon the deck have all been covered with a coating of white, and as the schooner glides on like a mist over the water, she presents a weird, spectral look that seems not of the earth or ocean, but like some immense winged chariot of the heavenly spheres.

Upon her after-deck stand a group of five officers, whose white broadcloth uniforms are handsomely trimmed with silver lace, and as the schooner glides on, one of them remarked:

"As I expected, Claude, I am frightened most to death at our own ghostly get-up. If there is a bloody pirate alive upon Corsair's Paradise tomorrow, after a look at us, then I'll feel deeply aggrieved."

"Why, Guy, you would not have them commit suicide, would you? Remember we wish about fifty of the cut-throats for our crew," answered Claude Alberti.

"What a pity it is night, and we will not be able to display our colors, Claude; that flag alone would make them run, like the herd of swine of old, violently over the steep places into the sea," put in Minturn, while Preston May remarked:

"I must confess, Pierre, I do not believe we will ever get within hailing distance of a mother's son of them; anyhow I say success to the Dare-Devil."

"I'll take the wheel now, Robert, there looms the island ahead of us," and Pierre Leon stepped forward and relieved the man at the helm.

Slowly moved the cloud onward; nearer and nearer it drew toward the black-looking island, which even under the silvery light of the moon looked barren and desolate.

All was silence aboard, except now and then an order in the deep voice of Pierre, who firmly grasped the wheel and guided the schooner onward as if to dash her against the rocky cliff.

"Captain Alberti, please order the men to silently go to quarters; we are nearing the inlet now," and the order was passed forward and obeyed in silence, all the crew seeming to feel awed by the impressive scene.

"There, she feels the current now; see, we are in the channel," and the prow of the schooner swung round and pointed toward the center of the island, while her speed increased fourfold.

Calm, and with a face rigid and stern, as if determined to beat back bygone memories by force of will, Pierre Leon stood at the wheel, his eye one moment upon the rocky cliffs, and then upon the prow of the vessel.

On glided swiftly the spectral-looking vessel, and just as her crew believed that she was going to destruction, her sharp prow turned into the rocky entrance that towered far above her

masts, and in between these walls of granite, she wound for some time in darkness, and then came suddenly out into the lake, and as she moved noiselessly along upon the placid and moonlit waters, really looked like

"A painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."

Far over the waters and upon the land the silence of death reigned; here and there upon the lake the spars of some fishing craft pointed heavenward, and lying out some distance from the shore was the dark hull and towering spars of a large ship, the only dark spot upon that silvery fairy scene of loveliness and quietude.

"It seems a pity to break this silence, to mar this scene with the thunders of war; does it not, Preston?"

"Yes, Guy; I had not before dreamed of such beauty; if earth can be thus serene, thus holy in the silence of Nature, and thus lovely, what must Heaven be?" answered the young lieutenant.

"This is a land of enchantment, Guy, is it not? It seems as if I would like to come here, when the ashes of hope alone remain, and here live out the remainder of my days; but we must cease dreaming; cast away beauty and lovely Nature and deal alone in realities, the inventions of man, and break the ideal our fancies have painted; shall I order a broadside, Pierre, into that dark hull yonder which you say is the last of the pirate fleet?" and Claude reluctantly turned from contemplation to stern duty.

"It were better to begin at once, captain; the sooner the better perhaps for all of us," returned Pierre, and the sad light that the old familiar scene had brought to his face in remembering the past gave way, and the fire of anticipated battle lit up his eyes and flushed his cheeks, for he knew the taking of the island would not be a bloodless triumph.

"To your posts, men!" and Claude's voice rung with a metallic sound.

"Are you ready?"

"Ay, ay, sir," came from the gunners.

"Bring her round a little, Pierre. Aim your guns at that pirate vessel yonder. Steady, Pierre. Fire!"

Loud, long and terrific was the crash and rolling sound of the guns, and under the iron hail turned loose upon her the old corsair vessel reeled and shook from stem to stern, while shriek after shriek rent the air.

"Tack from one shore to the other, Pierre. Lively with your guns, men, and aim only at the ship," cried Claude, in ringing tones, and swiftly the Dare-Devil moved over the lake before a freshening breeze, and the thunders of her guns echoed far and wide.

With the frenzy of fright the pirates rushed on deck, to meet death from the iron hail, and those that escaped cast one glance at the white Specter Yacht that was pouring upon them such a destructive fire, and springing overboard endeavored to gain the land by swimming.

The cries of affright from those on land, the flashes of torches here and there, and the distant view of white-robed figures flitting toward the distant hills, showed how terrible was their fright, and how clearly they believed that the schooner was not of the earth earthy.

"Cease firing!" and, with the order of her commander, the schooner glided out from the smoke of her guns and came into the bright moonlight in all her spectral grandeur.

"This is too much of a one-sided affair, Pierre, to suit me; I shall land with twenty men and press on toward the hills in search of Don Pedro," said Claude, earnestly.

"I will accompany you; the other officers had best remain on the schooner, in case of accident, and preparations were instantly made for landing.

In five minutes two boats left the schooner and pulled rapidly to the land, where, upon grounding, the men sprung ashore and, led on by Claude and Pierre, started at a quick pace in the direction of Don Pedro's quarters.

Arriving within a few yards of the house, they were met by a volley of musketry, which for the moment took them by surprise, and killed two of their men.

"Old Don Pedro is awake at last," cried Pierre, and on the men rushed toward the quarters of the outlaw chief, and which was known as "The Palace."

But though the place was stormed and taken, Don Pedro was nowhere to be found, for he had fled.

As Pierre stood in silence, and evidently in painful meditation, for something seemed to have gone wrong with him, he heard a ringing cry:

"Help! oh! save me!"

"It is Adina's voice," he almost shrieked, and he darted down toward the shore at a pace which distanced all who followed him excepting Claude Alberti.

The cry had come from a dense copse of woods, growing on a point extending out into the basin.

As Pierre reached the spot he beheld a tall man in the Algerian uniform just shoving a boat from the shore, while in the stern was a maiden, her hands in irons, as could be seen by the bright moonlight glittering upon the metal

Seeing Pierre the man gave the boat a hard shove and seized the maiden in his arms.

But, with a mighty bound Pierre sprung from the bank, which was about six feet above the boat, and lighted in the bows, his cutlass in hand, while he cried:

"Hold, Don Pedro, you are my game! Release that maiden!"

"Back! Christian dog, or I drive my cutlass to her heart!" was the savage reply of the pirate chief, and, as he spoke he held her before him with his left arm, while he grasped the blade of his cutlass about half-way from the hilt, and held it above her heart.

It was a fearful moment, for Pierre had recognized Adina, the young girl he had resolved to rescue, and he had no load in his pistol, and dared not advance with his cutlass, for well he knew the old chief would keep his word.

In spite of her danger the maiden did not shrink, and thus for one instant lasted the thrilling tableau.

Then, out of the darkness of the wooded point, came a flash and report, and Don Pedro fell backward into the sea, still bearing the form of Adina in his arms.

It was Claude Alberti who had fired the shot, and his deadly aim went to the pirate's brain.

Instantly Pierre sprung into the sea and disappeared from sight, and a moment after he arose with the maiden in his arms, having torn her from the death-grip of Don Pedro.

The lovely girl, grown into beautiful womanhood since Pierre had last seen her, had not lost consciousness, and soon told her story of how Don Pedro had tried to force her to become his wife, and that very day had put her in irons to starve her to death, he had threatened, if she still continued her refusal of his demand.

Begging Pierre to take her to the land of her mother, who was in Mexico, where she could find her kindred, Claude willingly gave his consent and a state room of the yacht was fitted up for her.

All that Pierre had promised regarding the island was fully realized, for the Dare Devil easily got fifty good seamen to add to her crew, and they were men who had fought a hundred sea-fights, while guns, small-arms, and everything needful was readily obtained.

After a week's stay at the Corsair's Paradise, the Dare-Devil hoisted her sails and stood out into the ocean, her sharp prow turned to seek new adventures upon the mighty deep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WRECK AT SEA.

AGAIN at sea! this time not upon the decks of the Dare-Devil, however; but I will transport my reader to the poop-deck of a large packet-ship, such as crossed the ocean as passenger-vessels before steamships came so regularly into use.

A gay party are upon the deck, some laughing and talking, others reading, and more promenading, in all a dozen persons, both male and female.

Two of the group the reader has met before, for as soon as the blue eyes are raised from the book she is reading, the lovely face of Nellie Lyndon is revealed, while near her, conversing with a gentleman friend, is her father, Mr. Howard Lyndon, the wealthy Baltimore merchant, whom, with his fair daughter, we last saw upon the deck of the Nellie Lyndon as she sailed from the river in Maine, near the banks of which stands the princely house of Elgin.

Returning to their own home, near Baltimore, Mr. Lyndon had found it necessary to make his arrangements for a voyage to England and the Continent, and thinking the trip would be enjoyed by Nellie, he determined to take her with him, and thus, a few months after, they set sail from New York in the stanch ship Mabel, bound to London.

A small, but pleasant party were on board, and the long days and nights at sea were whiled away by the passengers to suit themselves.

More than three-fourths of their way across the trackless ocean had been passed over, and hopes were entertained that ere many days the green shores of old England would come in sight, and the tedious voyage be ended; but as night came on clouds began to darken the western horizon, and when Nellie looked up from her book she was surprised to see how rapidly the sky was becoming overcast.

On the good ship plowed her way, and when night had settled upon the ocean the winds whistled through the rigging with a dreary, ominous sound.

Toward midnight the storm broke upon the devoted ship, and the loud commands of her officers, the heavy dash of the waves against her oaken sides, and the howlings of the wind, as it rushed in mad fury over her decks, was sufficient to make the stoutest heart quail.

Through that terrible night, through the following day, the fearful storm continued, and the scared faces of the passengers, the anxious looks of the ship's officers, proved that all felt their danger.

Again darkness wrapped the sea in gloom, and as if to make itself visible in the midnight blackness, the storm increased, a wailing, shrieking blast swept over the ship, followed by a

tremendous crash, a snapping of ropes in twain, and a heavy fall upon the sea washed decks.

"Axes to cut away the foremast," came in stern tones from the deck, and for an instant the ship careened so fearfully that the passengers gave themselves up for lost.

Again a cry was heard through the storm, more appalling than the other.

"Man overboard!" and then the captain's quick order:

"Keep her steady, helmsman, we cannot save them," proved that more than one poor seaman had been washed away by the mad waves.

"Father, this is fearful," and the tearful face of Nellie Lyndon was raised, as she continued:

"Is there no help for us?"

"My daughter, it is not so bad as that; we have lost our foremast, and one or more seamen, but the hull of our vessel is strong, and will yet, I trust, live out the gale; I will go upon deck and speak with the captain," and as the words left his lips, there came another wild sweeping of the wind, another awful crash, and the good ship Mabel was dismantled, and rolled like a log in the ocean.

The passengers could no longer be kept below, and rushed madly from the cabin, where they huddled down in affright upon the poop-deck.

A wild scene met their gaze, for as far as the eye could reach, the angry waves were dashing about in terrific grandeur, the ship was a mastless hulk, rolling about at the mercy of the storm, and clouds hung from the heavens in inky blackness, which ever and anon, were split asunder by vivid flashes of forked lightning, while peal after peal of thunder made the very wind tremble with its deep moanings.

"I have never seen a more awful storm, Mr. Lyndon, although, man and boy, I have followed the sea forty years," said Captain Willis of the Mabel, as he turned and gazed out upon the ocean.

"It is a fearful night, captain, and God grant we ride through it; how many of those poor fellows were there washed off?" returned Mr. Lyndon.

"Five of them, sir; they were on the bowsprit, and it gave way," answered the captain, drawing his coarse sleeve across his face, as if to wipe away the salt spray.

"There's a sail coming down upon us, captain," called out one of the seamen.

"Whereaway, my man?"

"Directly upon our starboard quarter, sir; you'll catch it with the next flash of lightning."

All eyes were instantly striving to pierce the inky gloom, and hearts almost ceased to throb, while awaiting for the next gleam that should show them that help was near.

It came at last, and with it were the startled tones of the captain:

"God in Heaven! what is that?"

All had seen what had caused the exclamation, and the superstitious sailors huddled more closely together in affright.

Again a vivid flash lit up the storm-tossed ocean, and in one voice the sailors cried:

"The Flying Dutchman!"

"No, the Specter Yacht, as I live!" exclaimed Mr. Lyndon, springing to his feet, and at his words Nellie also started up.

"Nellie, watch for the next flash; the lightning may give her that weird look, but if I mistake not that craft is the Specter Yacht!"

All the passengers had heard Mr. Lyndon speak of his capture and rescue by the strange schooner, and eagerly did they now watch for the coming vessel.

"There! there! look!" exclaimed a dozen voices, and all eyes beheld a large schooner-rigged vessel, painted white, and under close-reefed main-sail, fore-sail and jib coming rapidly toward them, and bounding from wave to wave, as if disdainful to have the sea fall upon her decks.

"That's Satan's own craft, to be out a night like this, Mr. Lyndon," said the captain, when he had observed the size of the schooner.

"Take your trumpet, captain, and be good enough to hail her, for she may pass us in this gale," answered Mr. Lyndon.

"Wreck aboy!" suddenly came in trumpet tones, heard above the howling of the storm.

"Ahoy the schooner!" answered Captain Willis.

"I see you are dismayed; can you hold out until daylight?"

"Ay, ay, sir! our hull is all right, if we do not founder."

"Then rig a jury mast, and put her before the wind; I will keep near you until morning. What ship is that?"

"The Mabel, from New York to London; what schooner is that?"

"The *Dire-Devil*!" came in the same clear tones, while Captain Willis remarked:

"By Jove! you deserve your name."

The jury-mast was rigged, and Captain Willis found it of considerable benefit, as it kept the ship steady, and prevented her swinging round and rolling in the trough of the sea.

It is true that "misery loves company," and in the case of the passengers and crew of the Mabel it was verified, for they felt far more easy in their minds in knowing that others

were near them exposed to the same cruel gale, and their hopes arose when they glanced out upon the waters and saw the Dare-Devil, now only under her jib, hovering near them, and watching their course through the ocean, as they were driven onward before the wind.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER THE STORM.

WITH relief at their hearts, the wearied and alarmed passengers of the Mabel saw the first glimmer of the coming day, and as the light increased the fury of the storm went down, and a little after sunrise the clouds began to break, and here and there upon the tempest-tossed ocean a ray of sunlight would fall, enkindling in the wearied watchers the hope that all danger was over.

About a quarter of a mile to windward the Dare Devil was visible, riding the waves with the grace of a sea gull, and with the rising of the sun, a flash came from her bows, then the report of a gun, and the strange flag of the little cruiser was run up, and catching the breeze was unfurled to the gaze of those upon the ship; while from the foretop fluttered the private flag of Claude Alberti.

Still onward the two vessels moved upon the waters, until noon, when the yacht stood down toward the Mabel, a figure sp. ung into the man-ropes, and the hail came:

"Ho, the Mabel!"

"Ahoy, the schooner!" answered Captain Willis.

"Lay to, and I will come aboard of you."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the officer sprung upon deck, the yacht was brought to, the cutter launched, and with steady stroke the seamen pulled for the Mabel.

"Father, these are the same two officers who boarded the Nellie Lyndon," said Nellie to her father, and again she placed her glass to her eyes.

"You are right, my daughter; but they have changed their uniforms; also the entire style of their vessel; besides her decks are now crowded with men," answered her father.

The cutter had now come near enough to catch a rope that was thrown from the ship, and in another moment Claude Alberti and Preston May stood upon the deck of the Mabel.

Their faces flushed at catching sight of Nellie and her father, but doffing their caps they bowed low, while Mr. Lyndon stepped forward and said:

"We have met before, sir, and again are my daughter and myself under the deepest obligation to you."

"Not at all, sir; we saw your vessel when she was dismayed, and put down to see if we could serve you; I have now come aboard to find the extent of the damage done, and place my yacht's cabin at the disposal of those passengers who fear longer to remain upon the ship."

"You are very good, sir," said Captain Willis, coming forward, "but I believe we will soon be all right again; that is as far as we can be by rigging jury-masts. I lost five men overboard last night, and three more are disabled, so will beg that you allow some of your men to aid me in getting the ship to rights again."

"Certainly. Boatswain, return again aboard the yacht and order thirty men to come to the ship. Have a care, the waves are running very high."

During the day the Mabel was put in a condition to continue slowly upon her course, and as the hours had passed on, Claude and Nellie had seen much of each other.

They had talked of their last meeting, of the putting into the river of the Nellie Lyndon, the scene at the fort, the combat at sea, the blowing up of the Mexican cruiser, and lastly of the storm that had again brought them together.

Nellie had also spoken of her visit to Elgin, but Claude had changed the subject at once, and therefore did not learn that his brother was not dead, as he might have done had Nellie continued, for she commenced to speak in the warmest terms of her friendship for the beautiful Miss Gray.

Toward evening the sea had greatly calmed down, and from remarks of both Nellie and Mr. Lyndon, besides hints from some of the other passengers, Claude determined to invite Miss Lyndon and some of her friends to visit the yacht, so he remarked to her:

"Miss Lyndon, perhaps yourself and father, with some of your friends, would like to go aboard of the Dare-Devil? There is no danger now, as the sea is not so rough, and my boats are safe."

"Indeed I should; it is so kind of you, captain; oh! father," and in a few moments half a dozen of the younger persons among the passengers were in the boats, being rowed rapidly to the yacht.

Mr. Lyndon had accompanied them, and as he gazed upon the daring, stern face of Claude, he could not understand the strange mystery that hung over him and his remarkable vessel.

He had gone forward among the men from the Dare-Devil, who were aiding Captain Willis, and endeavored to find out from them the name of their captain, and something of the vessel he commanded; but they were in blissful

ignorance upon all matters pertaining to the yacht, other than that her commander was a man of great wealth, cruising for pleasure, surrounded by brave men and true, and greatly beloved by all of his crew.

The cutter touched the side of the yacht, and the guests were welcomed by three officers remaining aboard and shown around the vessel.

Claude escorting Nellie, led the way, while Preston May had upon his arm a fair little lady, to whom Mr. Lyndon had presented him, although at a disadvantage in his introduction, for he did not know the name of the handsome lieutenant.

Guy, Oscar and Pierre had also their share of beauty, for among those who had come from the Mabel was a fair percentage of maidens, their curiosity causing them to wish to discover if the other officers of the Dare-Devil were as handsome and gentlemanly as the captain and lieutenant who had boarded the ship.

After having inspected the model of the graceful schooner, examined the guns, and glanced at the groups of seamen in their white uniforms, trimmed with silver, Claude led the way to her cabin, where his servant, Benedict, had prepared wine and refreshments for the guests.

Entering the cabin, Nellie was startled at beholding the vision of beauty that burst upon her, and still more surprised when she saw the graceful and lovely form of Adina Gomez, clad in a beautiful Persian dress, reclining upon a divan, and indolently glancing over the pages of a book she held in her hand.

"Adina," called Claude, and the lovely girl approached him; "Miss Lyndon, can I present the guardian angel of our vessel, Miss Gomez?"

Various thoughts flashed like lightning through Nellie's mind—who was this fair young girl? Why was she here?

Was there crime in that fair face? Could she be the—No, she would not give the thought shelter in her heart one moment—she would not; she could not doubt the purity of that innocent girl; and in an instant Nellie Lyndon stepped forward, took the little sun-browned hand in hers, and leant forward for a kiss, for an irresistible impulse drew her toward the lovely girl.

The great pearly tears came into Adina's eyes at this mark of kindness, for it was the first kiss she had felt upon her lips since, in years gone by, her mother had kissed her rosy mouth.

The rest of the party had by this time assembled in the cabin, and, at the request of Claude, arranged themselves around the table, while he stood at the head, with Nellie and Adina upon one side of him, and Mr. Lyndon on the other.

Mr. Lyndon, also, Claude introduced to Adina, but to no one else, and strange glances were cast upon the maiden by others of the party, who could not account for her presence.

It was a pleasant group assembled there in the cabin of the yacht, and an hour passed delightfully to all, when, at the end of that time, Mr. Lyndon proposed to again go aboard the Mabel, as night was coming on.

Another parting toast, "The safe and speedy arrival of the Mabel in port," was given by Claude, and drank by all, and then the parting came.

An affectionate kiss between Nellie and Adina, a warm grasp of her hand from Mr. Lyndon, and the boats were entered and again returned to the ship, all having been delighted with their visit to the Dare-Devil.

Claude and Preston returned with their guests to the ship, and finding that the men had completed their work, orders were at once given for them to go on board the schooner.

After hearty thanks from the captain and passengers of the Mabel to the officers of the yacht, they were preparing to enter their boats, when Mr. Lyndon called Claude to one side, and said:

"Pardon me this liberty, sir; but twice you have placed me under the deepest obligations to you; I know nothing of yourself, your officers and crew, but feel that the mystery that hangs over you is not kept inviolate upon account of crime."

"Your gentlemanly manner, the noble conduct of your officers and men; above all, the presence of that fair young creature on board your vessel preclude the possibility of your being other than you appear, honorable gentlemen, led by some strange freak to appear in mask."

"You have excited in myself and daughter a deep interest, and if it should be in my way to serve you, or yours, remember I shall be ever ready."

"My home is near Baltimore, upon the shores of the Chesapeake; should chance ever bring you in those waters, remember we shall expect a call from you. Good-by."

Claude warmly grasped the hand extended to him, but without a word in reply, and raising his hat was about to descend into the boat, which was ready awaiting him, when he felt a light touch upon his arm, turned, and met the earnest gaze of Nellie Lyndon.

"Good-by—may success ever attend you," and the little soft hand was extended toward him.

Seizing firmly the offering, Claude bent low and pressed his lips upon the fair hand, which thrilled beneath the kiss, and murmuring:

"I thank you," turned and descended into the boat, and as he took his seat and grasped the helm, the soft tones of the voice that had addressed Nellie Lyndon were unrecognizable in the stern:

"Give way, men," spoken to the crew of his gig.

"Three cheers for the noble Dare-Devils," cried a seaman on the Mabel, and with a laugh, the passengers joined heartily in with the crew.

Claude raised his cap in response, while he replied:

"I will keep near you to-night, captain, in case of accident, and then leave you in the morning if you get along all right."

"Thank you, sir," and the boats were too far off for conversation, and shortly after were seen to join the yacht, which immediately got under way, and stood off to windward of the Mabel.

Through the night, the passengers who visited, from time to time, the deck, glanced out over the ocean, and could see, indistinctly in the distance, the shadowy outline of the schooner, keeping a watch upon the safety of the ship.

Nellie had remained late upon the deck, and when at last Mr. Lyndon had told her she must retire, she cast a lingering gaze upon the distant schooner, and sighing, accompanied her father into the cabin.

The next morning, when the passengers arose, they found the Mabel standing steadily on, and were told that the Dare-Devil had kept near them until almost day, when she had squared away in a westerly direction, and had not since been seen.

CHAPTER XV.

LOST OVERBOARD AT SEA.

"Do you remember the last time we sat here, Henry?"

"Can I ever forget that scene, Alice? It was just about this time in the afternoon, that we came here, and dismounting from our horses sat there to watch for the coming of Claude's sail; oh! how that remembrance comes over me; to think that my dear, noble brother Claude would have attempted my life."

"He was mad with jealous rage, Henry; he knew not what he did; you must forgive him, as I have done, for we were not blameless, remember."

"I have forgiven him long ago, Alice, and would I now knew where he was, that I might send for him to come again to Elgin; but yonder comes the little yacht, Spray, and they are beckoning to us from her decks; we must go down to the shore and get aboard; I trust we will have a pleasant evening for our sail," and the two descended the pathway leading from the old fort down to the water's edge; the same steep pathway that Claude Alberti had climbed the last night he had trod the shores of his native land.

The speakers were Henry Alberti and Alice Gray, and they were standing in the same spot where long months before they had stood and glanced out upon the ocean.

Henry had entirely recovered from his wound, and the color of health once again tinged his face.

They had gone down to the fort to go on board of General Alberti's new yacht, Spray, which had a few days before been launched, and in which the general had sailed up the river a mile or so, to take on board a party of the young people, in the neighborhood, to enjoy a moonlight sail upon the ocean.

A gay party of both sexes were gathered upon the Spray's deck, and as she put over toward the point of land where Henry and Alice stood awaiting, a hearty hail came from the joyous group.

Soon all were on board, and the pretty little yacht spread her white wings and flew seaward through the narrow and dangerous rock-bordered channel.

But a steady arm and skillful hand held her helm, and none thought of danger as the dainty craft danced over the waves.

Before a fair breeze the Spray glided on, and soon the rugged coast and green forests were far astern, and as the daylight died were, in a short while longer, only visible as a long dark line upon the horizon.

But soon a golden halo tinged the far-off horizon where sea and sky met, and all watched eagerly the rising of the moon, that was to add so much to the beauty of the evening's sail.

An older look had come upon the face of General Alberti, for the long days and nights he had passed at the bedside of his wounded son, and the many silent heart-achings he had felt for the absent wanderer from his boyhood's home, had told upon the genial face of the old man; but otherwise he was the same, and right gleefully did he join in the sport of those around him.

Among those gathered upon the Spray's deck were the sisters of Preston May; and others of the group were all the relatives or friends of

those who had sailed with Claude a year and a half before in the Wanderer.

A feeling of uneasiness at the protracted stay of the Wanderer in South American waters had for a while pervaded the community, but word had in some way come that her crew were all well, and that she was going upon an extended cruise that would keep them away for some time longer, so that, though missing the absent ones from the home circles around Elgin, there was no dread felt of any serious accident having befallen them.

Far from the land sailed the Spray, her path across the snow-capped waves lighted by the moon, and the air around her stirred by the strains of sweet music, which but added another charm to the evening's enjoyment.

Two hours had passed, and then General Alberti turned to the pilot and said:

"Put her about, Mayo, for the wind is dying away and we can hardly get back before midnight."

But when the prow of the Spray was pointed landward, a sudden hush fell upon all, for while they had been sailing gayly outward in the silvery wake of the rising moon, behind them the heavens had become overcast with murky clouds, and toward the land the whole sea was overshadowed by this blackness.

"Well, Mayo, this looks gloomy," said the general.

"Yes, sir, and the wind is going to leave us altogether, and then come back with a rush."

"I fear so; well, we must make the best of it, and get ready to receive the storm when it bursts upon us," and General Alberti immediately set to work preparing for the coming gale, which now, all could see, would soon break upon them.

Guitars, violins and flutes were hastily stowed away in the tiny cabin, positions assigned to the young men, so that they might aid in handling the craft, and the ladies were sheltered by tarpaulins and oil-skins aft, and protected by strong ropes to prevent accident.

The sails were now idly flapping, no breath of wind fanned the waters, and with close-reefed sails, and the pilot, Mayo, at the helm, the Spray lay upon the waters prepared to battle with the storm-king, and fly over the dark ocean to a haven of safety.

The low rumbling of the distant thunder at last echoed over the waters; then its muffled voice grew louder; fiercer and fiercer, until its angry tones broke in a mighty crash, and a lance of fire split in twain the black heavens.

Then burst the wind upon the little yacht, which bowed low to meet the blast, and in a sheet of blinding spray dashed onward over the waves, guided by the steady hand of the pilot.

"She rides nobly, Mayo; I did not expect the little Spray would have to stand such a test as this," said the general, holding fast to the mainmast.

"She's as light on the wing as a sea-gull, general; here, sir, hold her steady a moment, while I go forward and take another reef in that jib. There, sir, keep her so," and leaving the helm in the hands of General Alberti the pilot worked his way forward, crawled out upon the bowsprit, and began his dangerous work of reefing the jib.

His task had just been completed, and he was slowly making his way back upon the deck, when a huge sea struck the little vessel suddenly, careening her far over, and tossing her bow high in air; it, the next instant, was buried in the waves, a wild, despairing shriek startled all on board, and the poor pilot was torn from his hold, and carried away upon the seething waters.

For an instant it was doubtful if the Spray would rise again above the waves; but with a tremendous bound, as if really a "thing of life," the gallant vessel shook the waters from her decks, and once more dashed on, leaving Mayo far astern and beyond all human aid.

"We have lost poor Mayo, my children, and none of the rest of us can pilot the Spray into the river; but do not despair, we may yet get safely through this terrible night, for the little yacht bears up nobly," said General Alberti, in a cheerful voice; but as he glanced over the ocean, and noticed that the waves were momentarily increasing in size, and heard the louder whistling of the wind, he doubted in his heart if the Spray would ever again anchor beneath the shadow of the old fort.

"Father, let me aid you with the helm," and Henry joined his father aft, and together their united strength held the yacht upon her course.

"Do you not think we can seek shelter behind one of the islands, and there wait until morning, father?"

"My son, you do not know this coast; in a quiet day, even, none but a person well acquainted with the coast could pilot a vessel through the narrow channel. We have but one chance, to stand off and on until morning, when some pilot-boat can come out and take us in; but I fear the Spray cannot much longer sustain the fearful blow, and it is each moment becoming more severe. God alone can save us now!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PHANTOM PILOT.

"LOOK! father, dead ahead! we are running upon a cliff!" exclaimed Henry, while General Alberti, throwing his full force upon the helm, cried:

"Down! hard down the helm!" and yielding to her tiller, the Spray rapidly swung round, and bounded off upon another tack, and away from the indistinctly seen white wall, upon which she a moment before seemed rushing to destruction.

But the white cliff did not disappear in the distance behind them; no, it drew nearer, nearer, and glancing for an instant astern, Henry cried:

"As I live, it is a vessel."

His father also looked steadily at the moving white mass, and replied:

"A phantom one then, my son: for see the sail she carries; besides she is white from her hull to her topmast; this is a strange sight, is it not?" and the old gentleman seemed puzzled.

On rushed the white phantom, rapidly overhauling the little yacht, and, as it was dashing by, a voice hailed suddenly:

"Aho! the yacht!"

"Ay, ay, sir," returned General Alberti, through his speaking trumpet.

"Whither bound?" came in the same voice.

"Into the mouth of the river near by," answered the general.

"Where is your pilot?"

"Lost overboard!"

"Put your helm up, and follow close in our wake."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the general, and he immediately obeyed the order, and stood after the phantom vessel, which had changed her course and was rapidly dashing landward.

All on board the Spray had listened anxiously to the conversation between the general and the officer upon the strange vessel, and their hearts beat high with hope as the little yacht stood on in the wake of the stately craft that was fleeing like a phantom before them.

Not a person had been visible upon her decks to the eyes of those upon the Spray, and the strange vessel seemed guided by some mysterious movement, as if governed by unearthly hands.

Alice had listened to the voice from the stranger, and had arisen and made her way to the side of General Alberti and Henry.

"Ha! Alice, you here, my darling?" said Henry, extending one hand and drawing the fair girl down beside him.

"Yes, Henry, I came to ask you if you noticed that voice?"

"Yes, it was a clear, ringing voice; what else?"

"It was Claude's," answered Alice.

"Ha! say you so?" said the general—while Henry returned:

"Yes, I believe you are right; it is strange I did not recognize it at once."

"My noble boy! then we will again have him with us," broke from General Alberti in earnest tones.

"God grant it, father! but look, we are overhauling the schooner; listen," and again the clear voice pierced through the storm.

"Keep close under my quarter and I will lead you to an anchorage."

Many upon the Spray cheered with joy at this ray of hope from their phantom pilot, while Alice said:

"Am I not right, Henry?"

"You are," he answered, while his father replied:

"I know it must be so; none other than Claude would dare run a vessel into the harbor through such a storm as this. With confidence we will follow him."

The phantom pilot had reduced her sail so as not to run away from the Spray, and over the raging waters the two vessels stood on toward the land.

An hour passed, and then a dark object appeared off the starboard bow, and in a moment more a wall of white rose upon the other bow.

"Look, Henry; there is the outer island, and to the left are the breakers; we are entering the channel now."

Steering closely in the wake of the larger vessel, the little yacht moved on, the two at the helm closely watching every motion of their pilot, and quickly following the ringing command that ever and anon came to them.

"This is indeed wonderful; Claude is piloting two vessels through these reefs at the same time," said General Alberti, in a tone of admiration.

"Claude would always undertake and accomplish what no other man dare attempt, father!" said Henry, quietly.

On dashed the two vessels, and again the loud command came from the phantom pilot:

"Hard! hard! down your helm."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered General Alberti, through his trumpet, in the studied reply of seamen.

"Port!"

"Port it is, sir."

"Keep her steady—now port!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Starboard your helm!"

"Starboard 'tis!"

"Steady!—now you are safe," and as the Spray was hurled from the whirlpool of waters, and floated in a comparatively smooth sea, beneath the overhanging shadow of the fort-crowned cliff, the phantom pilot was seen to suddenly go about, let out a reef in her sails, and silently dash away again, back through the tortuous and dangerous channel through which she had guided the Spray to safety.

Loudly did General Alberti hail the weird-like vessel as it bounded away, and Henry, Alice and a chorus of voices joined in with him, but no answer came back over the waters, as the phantom pilot rapidly bounded away, and disappeared in the distance.

The landing of the tired, but frightened party was effected in safety, and while all went home rejoicing at their strange deliverance from a frightful death, the hearts of General Alberti, Henry and Alice were weighed down with sorrow, and in the cold, driving wind they stopped as they passed through the fort and gazed out upon the stormy sea.

No eye could pierce the gloom, and they were about to start for Elgin, when far out from land they saw a flash; a blue spectral light burned brightly for a while, lighting up the outline of their phantom pilot, as she scudded away before the gale, and then the light vanished and darkness again rested upon land and sea.

"My poor, poor boy, will I never see his dear face more?" murmured General Alberti, as he turned away from the fort and accompanied Henry and Alice to Elgin.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON BOARD THE DARE-DEVIL.

THE appearance of the Dare-Devil, at the time she proved of such valuable assistance to the packet-ship Mabel, may be accounted for by Claude's determination to run up the coast of Spain and France toward the regular line of traffic between America and Europe, and then cross the ocean upon that course, so as to intercept any vessel that might be at sea, flying the Mexican flag.

He had stood on that course until the green isle of England came in sight, and then put away across the Atlantic, and it was when he was only a few days' sail from land that the yacht was overtaken by the same storm that dismantled the Mabel.

After parting company with the packet-ship the Dare Devil again turned her prow toward America, and after a rapid run came in sight of Cape Sable just at sunset, and having learned from a fishing smack, which Preston May had hailed, that she had been brought to during the afternoon by an armed vessel, supposed to be a Mexican cruiser, as none on board could speak English, Claude determined to round the cape and cruise for a day or two in the Bay of Fundy in search of the reported stranger.

The distant shores of Maine were in sight just before sunset, and Claude Alberti and Preston May were pacing the deck and glancing with wistful eyes upon their native land.

The sun set, and ere long the heavens became blackened with the clouds that had so startled the party upon the little Spray.

"Look, Preston; all was bright and beautiful here on sea and land until I came, when see the change. Nature has hid its beauty beneath overhanging clouds which frown upon my Cain-accursed life—"

"You should not be so gloomy, Claude; after all, Henry may not have died," answered Preston, sympathizingly.

"Not have died, Preston? You know my unerring aim. I sent my ball in search of his life; he fell; I fear my aim was too true; but, would to God that he were only wounded, and gladly would I resign Alice and all I hold dear."

"I have hoped that all will yet be well, Claude, and that the halls of Elgin will again echo to your footfall."

"Never! if my brother sleeps in the shadow of its forest, sent there by my hand. I could not endure it, Preston. How gladly would I land and visit the old scenes to find out the truth; how gladly would I let you and my brave boys revisit their homes, and be greeted by their families; but I cannot—there is work ahead of us to do—so far we have done nothing except make our preparations, and now we must fly southward and battle for our country. Perhaps in some engagement I may be taken from you, and then, Preston, old fellow, the Dare-Devil belongs to you, and crowned with the laurels I hope we shall win for her, you can return to dear old Maine, and tell of our past career; perhaps even all these known, I might not, being dead, be visited with the curses that would be heaped upon me living."

"Claude, you acted with mad rage, not with any thought in what you did. With all due respect to the dead, if Henry is dead, I must say that he acted an ungenerous part toward you, and certainly must have met with encouragement from Alice Gray. They sinned against you, and their crime caused you, in a moment of frenzy, to seek revenge by taking Henry's life—"

"Hush, Preston; you must not speak against the dead; nor of the woman who loved him. If she had only awaited my coming, and then told me she loved my brother better than she did me, all would have been well; both would have been forgiven; but now 'tis too late, too late."

"We are going to have a hard blow of it, Claude," said Preston, wishing to change the subject, and dispel the gloom that he saw was coming upon his friend and commander.

"Yes, I see; prepare the yacht to meet the shock, for it will be severe, I judge, from the way it comes on. See, the wind has left us, and the moon is hidden by that black mass of clouds," and as Claude spoke he was joined by Adina Gomez, and turning to her he said, pleasantly:

"Your advent into American waters, Adina, is to be the signal for a storm; but we will soon ride it out, and you have become such a good sailor I do not think you will mind it."

"Oh, no, Captain Claude, I like it when it storms, and besides I do not think we can have a gale worse than the one in which the Mabel was dismasted."

"No, that was a perfect tornado, such as I hope we will not have to ride through again."

"Double reef the sails, Oscar, and make all snug," he continued, addressing Minturn, who was aiding Preston in putting the yacht under easy sail to meet the blow.

On rushed the storm, lashing the sea into fury before it, and making its howlings visible for miles in its front.

The bow of the Dare-Devil was brought round to meet the shock, the officers and men were at their posts, and in silence, and with a gentle rocking motion, the gallant schooner awaited the burst of fury to break upon her.

It came at last, forcing the sharp bows high in air, filling the reefed sails, and forcing the vessel along at tremendous speed.

"How is she headed, helmsman?" called out Claude, his voice distinctly heard above the roaring of the wind and the dash of the waves.

"South, southwest, sir," was the reply.

"Keep her so"—and through the seething caldron rushed the schooner.

"A sail, dead ahead, sir," was passed from the lookout forward to Preston May, who was lashed to a gun amidships, and the word was by him passed on to Claude.

"On what bow is she?" he called out.

"Two points off the starboard, sir—hal! she has gone about," came from the lookout.

"Keep her steady, helmsman," and on flew the Dare-Devil in the track of the little Spray.

In a short while the superior speed of the schooner overhauled the yacht, and Claude hailed, and finding out that she had lost her pilot, determined to guide her into the harbor at the mouth of the river.

"Ask Lieutenant May to come aft," he called out to a seaman, after the schooner had changed her course toward the land.

"Preston, that yacht belongs near Elgin, and there is a pleasure party upon her decks; we must save them."

"Certainly, and the only way is to run through the channel with her close under our quarter; but you alone can run a vessel in through this storm."

"It is a dangerous undertaking, Preston; but I shall undertake it, come what may. The yacht cannot live an hour longer, strained as she is by her crowded decks, and this blow, so we must risk all to save her. Perhaps our relatives, our friends may be upon her."

"Just my thoughts, Claude; let us risk the schooner, our lives, everything to save them."

"Good, my noble fellow," and Claude's face brightened, as he continued in a low tone:

"It will make my heart lighter, Henry, to save lives that may atone for my crime in the past."

The safe arrival of the Spray, under the pilotage of the schooner has been seen, by the reader, and when the little vessel was out of all danger Claude gave the order to put the Dare-Devil about, and again stand to sea on her southerly course.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MUTINY IN THE STORM.

OBEYING to her helm, the graceful schooner swung round and her sharp prow again parted the waves as she dashed through the narrow channel in her seaward flight.

Having piloted his vessel safely through the reefs and islands, and ordered her to be put upon a southerly course, Claude descended into the cabin, accompanied by Preston May, and leaving his other officers in charge of the deck.

He had been seated there but a short while, when his servant, Benedict, rushed into the cabin, exclaiming:

"The men have mutinied, captain, and are going to run the schooner into the nearest port."

"Are they?" coolly said Claude Alberti, while he buckled on his sword and pistols and ascended to the deck, followed by Preston, also armed.

The storm still continued, although it had abated somewhat in fury, and a group of sea-

men were huddled aft, demanding in loud and angry tones of the three officers that the schooner should be run into the nearest port.

"What is the trouble, Lieutenant Minturn?" asked Claude, as he and Preston joined the other officers.

"The men insist upon being allowed to land and go ashore for a day or two, before going south upon our cruise," answered Oscar.

"Is it my old crew, or the new, or both, that make this demand, Mr. Minturn?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, it is the old crew; those who live on the coast, near by."

"Men, go forward to your duty, and let me hear no more of this," sternly said Claude, glancing over the group of seamen.

"Captain, we wish to visit our homes, sir, first, and if you permit us to do so, we will then go with you south," answered a burly seaman, who for two years had sailed with Claude, and the only one of his crew with whom he had ever had trouble.

"And in case I do not give you that permission; what then, Max?" answered Claude, in a pleasant voice.

"We will take the yacht into port ourselves," impudently answered the man addressed as Max.

"Mr. Minturn, bring the schooner to," and Claude's voice startled both officers and men by its sternness; and Adina, who had also ascended to the deck, saw by the cabin light, which shone upon Captain Alberti's face, that there was danger in it to the man who would gainsay his orders.

Oscar Minturn gave the orders to the helmsman to bring the schooner to, a few of the corsair crew sprung to their posts to attend to her sails, and the schooner no longer plunged through the waters.

"Men, I again order you to your posts—you have enlisted aboard of my vessel, to go wherever I choose to take her; not far off yonder on the shore lies my own home, and there also dwell the families and relations of three of my officers; and in turning their backs upon them they but obey my orders, although they would be glad to once again set foot upon their native sand."

"I ask of you no more than I ask of them, and I expect, and shall have from you the same obedience I receive from them. Now back to your posts."

But not a man moved, excepting one, who stepped forward and joined Max in his advanced position, speaking to him at the same time in a low tone.

The deathlike stillness of the group was only broken by the wailing of the wind and the dashing of the waters, and for some moments this painful silence continued, when Max again spoke:

"Captain Alberti, we won't be hard on you, sir; you can land those of us as is anxious to go home, upon the coast to-morrow, and when you get south you can fill our places—"

"Back to your posts, men!" and the voice was stern but cool.

"You won't let us go ashore then?" asked the companion of Max, while the seamen crowded forward more closely.

"No, sir; go to your posts—once more I order you. Go forward!" and the voice was threatening.

"We will not—" but the words of the mutineer, Max, were cut short by a flash that lit up the deck, the report of a pistol, another shot quickly following the first, and two heavy falls upon the deck, while in trumpet tones Captain Alberti cried:

"Turn that stern gun upon them, Mr. May; now to your posts, bounds, or I'll blow you into atoms where you stand."

The ringing voice struck terror to the hearts of the men; two of their number lay dead upon the deck, killed by their commander's pistol, the stern gun was pointed upon them, charged with death-dealing iron, and with one accord they rushed forward, dodging behind the guns, the masts and everything that gave shelter, while the cries of "Mercy, captain!" "Quarter! Quarter!" were heard upon all sides.

Claude Alberti stood for an instant in silence, his smoking pistol in one hand, a drawn sword in the other, and seeing no further resistance would be offered, he called out:

"Come up here, men." Hurrying feet were heard, and the frightened crew again faced their daring commander.

"Men, I have had a sad duty to perform to-night; let it never occur again that I shall have to raise my hand against my own crew. Those of you who were true to me, I thank; to those who would have deserted me, I offer no other punishment than they have received—I ask no questions who they were; their ringleaders lie there dead; they wished to go ashore—throw their bodies overboard, and let the waves wash them there. Now go forward, and know in future that I will allow no dictation from my crew, as to my course of action."

Saluting the men, who, after an instant's silence burst forth in a loud, prolonged cheer for their captain, Claude turned from the deck, calling to Preston to follow him, and saying to Oscar:

"Mr. Minturn, put the schooner upon her course again."

"Ay, ay, sir; to your posts, men, and get the ship again under way," and in obedience to the orders of their lieutenant, the seamen sprung nimbly to their duties.

"Oscar, things looked squally for a while," remarked Guy Rivers to Minturn, as they stood upon the deck together after the schooner was again cutting the waves in her trip south.

"Yes, indeed, it did look ominous for a while; but did you see Claude's face when he gave the last order to the men to go forward?"

"Yes, it was frightful; I never saw him look that way before."

"I have, once before, and I knew from past experience, that it meant death to those who opposed him," said Pierre Leon, coming aft and joining his brother officers.

"How was it, Pierre?"

"Yes, tell us about it, old fellow; it will relieve the monotony of this nasty night," replied Guy and Oscar, and as if willing to oblige them, Pierre returned:

"I will tell you of the circumstance that caused the look in Claude's face which we all saw to-night, and which I mentioned as having seen there once before;" and when the two officers had taken convenient positions near the mainmast, Pierre commenced to unfold a page in the past romantic life of Claude Alberti.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PAGE FROM CLAUDE ALBERTI'S PAST LIFE.

"You remember my having before told you of the manner in which Captain Alberti and myself first met in Australia," began Pierre Leon, "and also that I remarked that since then we had been together nearly the whole time?"

"We had gone to India, after sailing from Australia, and in the wild jungles of that country passed some months in tiger and elephant hunting, of which sport we are both excessively fond."

"We would make up parties of a dozen or more, composed of English officers upon duty there, tourists and old residents, and going to the hunting regions would camp and while away weeks in the dangerous, yet fascinating sport of killing big game."

"Among our party there was a young man, an Englishman, so he said, who was one of the most fascinating men I ever met, but whose heart was as evil as it is possible to be."

"He gloated over his conquests with women, with whom he was a general favorite, had fought numberless duels, killing or wounding his man every time, possessed ample means, was a fine musician, a good tenor, a superb rider, a crack shot, and an entertaining conversationalist. He seemed the life of the party, and though greatly liked, was equally as much feared."

"Claude alone of the party would dare to speak plainly to him, and when Rafael Sylvester, such was his name, would make an assertion that was untrue, and was met with Claude's flat contradiction to what he had said, the Englishman would laugh it off, and say pleasantly:

"Perhaps you are right, Alberti; we won't quarrel, for one of us would be certain to find his death, and the boys cannot afford to lose us; we are too good fellows for that," and his remark would be passed over."

"Yet I could see that he hated Claude, who also detested him, for his vain assertions regarding his conquests over innocent women who had confided in him; and I felt assured that, if they were much longer together, trouble would follow, and urged upon Claude to make his preparations for leaving India, before we became involved in any disagreeable scene."

"Claude promised to start in a few days, and remarked to me:

"Pierre, I wish no trouble with Sylvester; he is a villain at heart I know; but it pains me to hear him speak of women as he does."

"He also promised me to avoid Sylvester as much as he could, and I was in hopes that trouble might be avoided."

"Sylvester had with him two intimate friends; one a traveling companion, his devoted slave, by name Moro Valdir, a Spaniard; and a Captain Leo Graham of the English army."

"These three were always together, and were called on account of their fine forms and handsome faces 'The Three Graces.' Claude, and an English officer, Colonel Bertie Ross, commander of Captain Graham's regiment, and myself were inseparable companions and had been named 'The Blessed Three,' for the reason that one or the other of our trio had always hopped in with a lucky shot or thrust in hunting, just in time to save some poor fellow's life from an infuriated tiger or elephant."

"And a remarkable circumstance was that Claude had upon three separate occasions, by a reckless and daring act, saved the life of each one of 'The Three Graces.'

"Though indebted to him thus deeply, and profuse in thanks, I could see that Sylvester was anxious to have Claude out of the way."

"Thus matters went on, until the night before we were to break up our camp, when all of us, excepting Claude, who was looking after his horse, were seated around the camp telling jokes.

"Suddenly a courier, bearing the mail from the settlements, arrived, and handed around letters for those present for whom there were any.

"Quite a number fell to the lot of Sylvester, who opened and commenced reading them, breaking out now and then in a loud laugh at their contents.

"Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Hear this, boys, from a sweetheart of mine," and he commenced to read from the letter:

"DEAR, DEAR RAFAEL, if you have any mercy for me come back and make me your wife. You have taken from me, by false promises, my honor; will you not then give me your name to hide my shame from the world? I have given you my honor, my life—for if this shame comes upon me I shall die by my own hand. After this, will you not take me to your heart as your wife?"

"You say you fear I may be false to you; as I have yielded my honor to you, I might be untrue to you. How strange! because I have been untrue to myself, and true to my love for you, you now heap insult upon me. Oh, Rafael, do not desert me now in my sorest need. Come to me, make me your wife, and you will be ever cheered by the love of your now almost broken-hearted ANNE LEE."

"You, bearing the form of a man, dare insult a woman whom you have ruined by reading her letter aloud?"

"Coward! devil! it is an insult to every man present."

"Every one of our party sprung to their feet at these words, uttered in stern, cutting tones by Claude, for unseen he had joined the group and heard the letter read.

"Can I ask why you should insult me, Mr. Alberti, because I chose to read a letter aloud, received from a cast-off toy?" asked Sylvester, pale with rage.

"Your toy! liar! because a woman has fallen through her idolatrous love and trust, in one she believed true as her religion, must she be thus defamed? Mr. Sylvester, I know the girl you have ruined, an innocent child of sixteen, to whose aged father I brought letters of introduction when I came to India. Hence I shall make her cause my quarrel; you are a base scamp, sir, and shall answer to me for this stain upon her fair name."

"Be it so, Mr. Alberti; my friends are Captain Graham and Señor Valdir," and Sylvester turned upon his heel and walked away, followed by his two boon companions.

"Claude then entered his tent, after beckoning to myself and Colonel Bertie Ross to follow him.

"In a few moments the colonel and myself left the tent and sought that of Rafael Sylvester.

"He received us coldly but with politeness, and after reading the challenge from Claude said, quietly:

"Mr. Alberti should have received a challenge from me for his insult a while ago; but as he seems to feel aggrieved by a successful little love-affair of mine, and has anticipated me, I must needs accept. Please arrange any preliminaries necessary, gentlemen, with my friends here."

"We then turned to Captain Graham and Señor Valdir; and a meeting was arranged for sunrise the following morning, two pistols each to be the weapons used, and the contestants to be mounted upon horseback, fifty yards apart, and at a given signal to gallop toward each other, with the privilege of firing a shot from each weapon.

"I liked not this arrangement much, but yet accepted, and we left the tent and returned to Claude, who smiled when told of the strange *modus operandi* selected by Sylvester, and remarked, quietly:

"He has placed himself in greater danger than he thinks, by this move."

"Early the following morning we were upon the field, which was near the camp, and found that the whole party, servants and all, had turned out to witness the duel.

"The sympathy was with Claude, I could see, for none liked the insult offered to a too confiding woman by the man who had ruined her, and were in hopes that he would be punished for it.

"Claude stood beside his horse, smoking, and talking to one or two English officers, while Rafael Sylvester, also with a group near him, was making his steed perform sundry tricks, as if he were not to be an actor in a scene of life and death."

CHAPTER XX.

THE THREE DUELS.

"THE pistols were loaded," continued Pierre Leon, to his attentive and interested listeners, "and as I approached Claude to place in his hands the weapon I had loaded, he raised the holster of his saddle and dropping something therein, again buttoned the cover.

"Señor Valdir also observed the act of Claude,

as did Captain Graham, and, springing forward, the Spaniard exclaimed:

"Mr. Alberti, you have no right to use but the two pistols—"

"Nor do I intend to, sir," answered Claude, wheeling upon him.

"I saw you place a third in your holster, sir," said Valdir.

"And so did I," answered Captain Graham.

"Claude turned as white as a sheet, but he rejoined quickly:

"If you were gentlemen, you would be able to understand that a gentleman could do no mean action.

"Your charge upon me is false; hence, you both lie," and raising the cover of the holster, Claude drew therefrom a leathern-bound case, containing the painted miniature of a lovely woman, remarking as he did so, while he held the likeness in his hand:

"Gentlemen, you see what these hirelings of Mr. Sylvester thought to be a pistol; I placed it there because I feared a random shot would break the fair face; it is the likeness of my mother."

"All present were affected by his words; but Señor Valdir and Captain Graham both smarted under Claude's cutting words to them, and the former advanced and said:

"Mr. Alberti, you shall answer for this insult, if Mr. Sylvester does not end your days."

"And to me also; I will not bear your vile epithets with impunity," returned Captain Graham; who was a pretty fair fellow, and under other circumstances would have instantly offered an apology to Claude; but led on by Valdir, and a glance from Sylvester, he deemed it his duty to step forward and offer a challenge.

"Graham, you are a great fool," was his colonel's uncompromising remark to him, and he continued, turning to Claude:

"Mr. Alberti, allow me to relieve you from one of your engagements."

"And I will take another off your hands," I remarked; but Claude replied:

"Let me get this affair over with, and I am at the service of both of these fellows; though I thank you, gentlemen, for your kind offers."

"I now stationed Claude, while Captain Graham did the same for Sylvester.

"We had won the word, and at the command of Colonel Ross, the two principals started forward toward each other, the Englishman at a rapid run, the American at a slow gallop.

"From the moment that Sylvester drove the spurs into his horse, at the jump, he fired, and before he had come within twenty feet of his opponent, he had emptied his pistols; while Claude had not raised his from his side.

"Seeing that Sylvester was at his mercy, he suddenly drew his horse up, aimed his pistol, and said:

"Mr. Sylvester, be good enough to take your life at my hands," and without firing he galloped over to where we stood, leaving Sylvester speechless upon his horse, for to give the devil his due, the villain had not flinched when he believed he was at Claude's mercy.

"Turning his horse slowly he joined his seconds, and after an earnest conversation Sylvester came over to our group and said:

"Mr. Alberti, you owe me no favors, therefore I accept none at your hands, and will hold you again responsible for your insult of last night, as soon as the difficulty existing between you and my seconds is settled. I am authorized by Señor Valdir to challenge you to meet him, sir."

"I am at his service. Señor Valdir prides him self upon his swordsmanship. Will the sword suit him as a weapon in this affair?"

"It will, sir," answered the señor.

"Claude then turned to me, and said:

"Be good enough, old fellow, to get my sword for me from the tent, and also bring my other dueling-pistols, as I will accommodate Captain Graham with these."

"I soon returned, and found Señor Valdir in his position, having removed his coat and vest. Claude also stood ready, and as I approached threw off his hunting-jacket.

"At a word the swords crossed and in a moment were clashing together, while the spectators stood around watching anxiously the result.

"One of the tourists, a Russian nobleman, here remarked to me:

"This is a strange scene, Mr. Leon; Mr. Alberti saved the lives of these three men a few days since, and now they are all seeking his *mon Dieu!* how cool he is; behold!" and as he spoke Claude who had steadily pressed the Spaniard back, with all his boasted skill, by a dextrous movement sent his sword whirling from his hand.

"Señor, I offer you, also, your life," he coolly said, as he turned away, while the Spaniard was wild with rage.

"Colonel Ross, will you ask Captain Graham if it is his pleasure now; either one of my dueling-pistols are at his service?"

"Certainly, Alberti," and the colonel walked up to his sub-officer, and the preliminaries for another meeting were instantly made.

"I gave the word, and the Englishman fired at 'one,' his ball passing through Claude's hat,

and Claude himself then began to cough, and a deadly cross-bill came, not a tremor was in his voice, as he said:

"You are a pretty fair shot, captain, but I will not use you as a target for my pistol," and he fired at a small mark upon a tree a few yards distant, hitting it directly in the center.

"A wild burst of applause came from all present, both sportsmen and servants, and a number pressed forward to offer their congratulations upon his narrow escapes, and to express their appreciation of his noble conduct and cool courage.

"Now, I trust the affair is settled, Alberti, for you will not again meet that villain, Sylvester," said Colonel Ross.

"If he demands it, yes; though I hope he will not, for I wish not his blood; I am satisfied with having humbled him."

"The Three Graces were talking together some distance from our group, and we could discern by the vehement gestures of Señor Valdir, and the angry manner of Captain Graham, that they were also anxious to again test their skill with the man who had so defeated them.

"While I was watching them, the three seemed to make up their minds to some course, and all came forward to where we stood.

"Señor Valdir was the spokesman and said, angrily:

"Mr. Alberti, do you deem us children that you thus risk your life against us? We wish no mercy at your hands, and demand that you meet each one of us again, with the same weapons as before."

"Pardon me," was Claude's quiet rejoinder, "for reminding you that I am the challenged party. I accede to your demand upon my own conditions; which are, that you three are armed with pistols, are mounted upon horseback, and I, being also thus armed and mounted, shall be stationed one hundred yards distant from you; then, at a given signal, we approach each other, firing; and I warn you now, for, having spared you before, I now have the right, that I shall do my utmost to rid the earth of three such precious scoundrels."

"The proposition of Claude created the wildest excitement among all present, but it was useless to attempt to change his decision, and seeing that it was the only way in which he would meet them they accepted, and at once sent for their horses.

"All was now excitement among the spectators, and many protests were offered against so unfair a proceeding, but Claude would only say:

"I do not care to meet them; if they insist, they know my terms," and lighting a fresh cigar, he calmly sat down to enjoy it, while Colonel Bertie Ross and myself were measuring the ground and loading his pistols.

"The same was done for 'The Graces,' by two other gentlemen present, and in half an hour, all was ready for the duel of one man against three; three men, also, who would have been, days before, food for wild beasts had it not been for the one man whose life they sought; three men whom, I knew, and others believed, would have then been lying dead had he not in a moment of mercy spared their lives; now he was to meet them again, and as I looked into his face I saw there the same look which had rested upon it to-night when he bade those mutineers go forward to their duty.

"I knew then what was coming, and felt sorry that the men did not know Claude Alberti as I knew him; but see, Guy, is that not sail, yonder to windward?"

"No, I think not; no, it is where that one ray of moonlight falls upon the ocean," answered Guy Rivers.

"Yes, 'tis clearing off, and then we will have good weather I hope; go on with your story, Pierre, I am deeply interested," said Oscar.

Pierre stood a moment in silence, as if recalling the scene he had witnessed, and then continued his story of it in the same even voice in which he had before spoken.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRIPLE DUEL.

"WELL, I took Claude to his station, while Colonel Ross stood to one side to give the word, and the two gentlemen, who were acting for 'The Graces,' led their principals to position.

"Claude walked to the stand, his horse following him, and as he was about to mount he said:

"Pierre, there is a time when patience ceases to be a virtue; I am out of patience with those fellows, and— Well, watch the result."

"He wrung my hand hard, I looked into his face and was almost startled by that same threatening look which it wore to-night.

"Claude, is there nothing I can attend to for you were you to fall? You certainly must be prepared against accidents."

"Yes, old fellow, I always am. In my writing-desk you will find all instructions, bills of exchange for any funds you may need, and the request that you will carry my body to America and have it buried in the old Maine hills beside my mother; tell my father I did not

force this affair upon my opponents, but having been roused to resistance, I did all I could to uphold my name and position.

"We have been as brothers, Pierre, and in my will you will find I have not forgotten all your kindness to me.

"We have had gay times and sad times together, my friend; we have shared dangers together, and this may be our last earthly grasp of the hand, but I assure you—and the soft look that had come into his face for the moment was gone, and the hard, dangerous, threatening light reappeared in his eyes—"if I am killed, mine will not be the only dead body gazed upon to-day by the curious crowd. And, Pierre, if Sylvester should escape, strive to make him atone for his crime to poor Annie Lisle."

"Another grasp of the hand, and he sat erect in his saddle, his reins across his saddle-horn, a pistol cocked and tightly grasped in each hand, and a third in his right holster ready for use.

"His eyes fixed upon the three men who were mounted and awaiting, one hundred yards distant.

"A signal was given by the seconds of Sylvester and his companions that their principals were ready, and I also signaled to Colonel Ross, and, as if giving an order upon parade to his regiment, his loud voice was heard:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"A bow from all answered him, and the colonel called out, in his ringing tones:

"Charge!"

"We seconds had stepped out of range, after signaling to the colonel, and stood, with the others, anxiously watching the result.

"The three horsemen immediately started forward upon the run, one of them firing as they advanced, as if by some preconcerted plan among themselves.

"Claude also drove the spurs into his horse, sat erect in his saddle, and rushed toward his foes, not once raising his pistol, however, until two shots had greeted him from their weapons.

"Then he suddenly raised his arm, at the distance of thirty yards, and fired.

"Señor Valdir's arms were thrown wildly in the air, and his horse bounding forward hurled him from the saddle.

"Again the deadly right arm was raised with the pistol from the holster, and Captain Graham fell to the ground a dead man.

"But a shot from Sylvester's pistol crashed through the brain of Claude's horse, who, in falling, came near pinning his rider to the ground beneath him, but a nimble spring from the saddle saved Claude, who was raising his arm to fire upon his remaining foe, then but a few yards from him, when another shot passed through Claude's arm, and his pistol fell from his hand.

"A yell burst from the Englishman at his success, and he spurred toward his dismounted antagonist, but as quick as a flash Claude stooped, seized his pistol again, but with his left hand, leveled it, fired, and the soul of Rafael Sylvester left its crime-soiled casket of clay, and the handsome man, the popular, pleasant companion, the *libertino*, was a corpse.

"Claude had fired but three shots, while his foes had fired nine, and as the crowd gathered around him, where he stood beside his fallen horse, they gazed upon him with a kind of awe.

"Colonel, I regret exceedingly this morning's work, but I could not help it; has Graham any near relatives?"

"I believe not; he bought into the regiment, and we know nothing about his antecedents; but you are wounded, my dear Alberti; I trust not seriously," answered the colonel.

"No, it is a flesh wound only; but for the moment it paralyzed my arm; the doctor can soon set it right again."

"The three men were buried where they fell, and their graves marked and protected against disturbance by wild beasts, and the same day we broke up our camp, and a few days later were in Bombay, from which place Claude and myself soon after sailed for Europe."

"But what was the fate of poor Annie Lisle, Pierre?" asked Oscar, when the lieutenant had completed his story.

"A sad one, poor girl; she died by her own hand, when she knew that Sylvester was dead, and that her shame would be known to her parents. As it was, they suspected that she was only heart-broken at the tragic end of her lover, and without him did not care to live. Claude was condemned by her parents for Sylvester's death, but he would offer no excuse in palliation of his conduct, preferring that they should believe as they did, rather than awaken them to the sad truth."

Both of the officers were deeply moved by the story they had heard, and warmly thanked Pierre for his kindness.

The moon had pierced the clouds, that were breaking away, and here and there lit up the ocean with her silvery light.

The gale had gone down, the waves ran less high, and a steady breeze was driving the Dare-Devil along at twelve knots an hour, and forward, among the men, all seemed quiet, so Pierre and Guy bade good-night to Oscar, who was officer of the deck, and entered the cabin

where Claude and Preston were seated, enjoying their fragrant cigars and engaged in conversation.

After reporting to their commander, whom Guy gazed upon with renewed interest and respect, after having heard Pierre's story, the officers indulged in a parting glass of wine and separated for the night, to think and dream over the exciting scenes of the past day.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SPECTER YACHT AT WORK.

"SAIL ho!" and at the cry the officers of the Dare-Devil sprang from the table, where they were at breakfast, and rushed upon deck; for the daring little schooner had safely flown from the far-off coast of Maine down to the sunny southern clime of Mexico, and was running along in sight of land, looking closely for the sail of some Mexican cruiser.

"Whereaway?" called out Claude to the lookout, as he reached the deck.

"About three points off the starboard bow, sir, hugging the shore," was the answer.

"What do you make her out, sir?"

"I think she is one of those small Mexican gun-boats I've seen in the harbor at Vera Cruz, sir."

"All right, my man; watch her closely and report her every movement," and Claude and his officers returned to their breakfast.

It was a comfortable and cosy scene, that breakfast in the Dare-Devil's cabin, and all present seemed to enjoy it.

At the head of the table sat Claude, while at the other end the fair face of Adina Gomez shone above the silver coffee-urn.

On either side sat the four officers, and the background was relieved by the figure of Claude's servant, Benedict, and that functionary's *aide de salon*, Pomp, an intelligent specimen of the Southern negro.

After the meal was concluded, and it was rather hastened on account of the reported sail in sight, the group adjourned to the deck, and again Claude called out:

"Ho! the foretop!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Do you see that sail now?"

"Yes, sir; she is just disappearing behind a point of land, as if she was hiding in a small bay."

"Crowd on more canvas, Preston; we must overhaul that stranger; what a pity we have no pilot!"

A moment after, one of the seamen, who had been coiling rope near, and heard Claude's remark, stepped forward, and politely touching his cap, said:

"Captain Alberti, I know the Mexican coast, sir, from one end to the other, on the gulf side."

"Hail say you so? Then you are indeed a treasure; I believe your name is Nunez."

"Yes, sir; I am one of the corsair crew. I think the boatswain will say I do my duty, sir."

"I will say that for you, Nunez, for I have noticed you particularly."

"Thank you, sir. I was for ten years a mate upon a coasting revenue cutter in the Mexican service, and learned the coast well."

"Are you a Mexican?"

"No, sir. If I was I wouldn't expect you to believe or trust me; in fact, I wouldn't trust myself. I am a native of Florida, but lived most of my life in Mexico until I became a—pirate," and a glow of shame came upon the weather-beaten face of the man, who appeared about forty years of age.

"Well, that is past; you are now in an honest service. Serve me faithfully, and I believe that you will, and I shall not forget you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Mr. May, relieve this man from all duty aboard ship, except that of a regular pilot," and returning the salute of Nunez, Claude walked aft.

In an hour's time and before a good breeze the schooner had approached within two miles of the land, and was rapidly rounding the point where the strange sail had disappeared inland.

The bay, or inlet, gradually opened, and suddenly there came before the astonished gaze of the watching eyes of those upon the schooner a sight that startled them.

Not two miles off, and hidden from view until the Dare-Devil had rounded the point, were two large and three small Mexican cruisers, waiting anxiously for the prey they deemed in their power.

Without an order, and as quick as a flash, every man was at his post, and the schooner was ready for action.

Claude glanced with pride at this display of discipline in his crew, and at their eagerness to obey his orders.

Looking aloft he saw that the American ensign was not there, only the Dare-Devil flag;—which Adina had changed by skillful embroidery so as to make the figure, holding the cross and flaming sword, that of an angel form with snow-white wings—and his own flag.

"That is good; now we must start our mysterious career. Keep her as she is, helmsman. Preston, let a number of the men gradually crowd the schooner with all the sail she will stand," and the order of the commander was obeyed silently, the white forms in the rigging looking like ghosts as they attended to their duties.

Under her crowd of canvas the Dare-Devil rushed through the waters toward the Mexican vessels, which could now be distinctly seen, hardly a mile distant, their men at the guns, their decks crowded, and their every indication proving how certain they were of a prize.

Claude stood with his officers watching his enemy, and when he deemed he had approached sufficiently near for safety, he said quietly:

"Helmsman, let her fall off slowly."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Stand ready, men, to work your sails."

"Now, bring her round, helmsman, and put her behind that point of land."

"Ay, ay, sir," and so easily, quickly, and without any apparent motion did the schooner change her course that the astonished Mexicans did not observe her tactics until she was flying away from them before a fourteen-knot breeze.

Then they realized that their prize was escaping them, unless they could overhaul her by superior speed, or dismantle her with their guns, and the roar of artillery broke the stillness of the morning air.

Nunez, the pilot, here walked aft, and saluting Claude, said:

"Captain, can I offer a suggestion, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Do you observe that mist hanging over the coast yonder?"

"Yes, it looks like a line of chalk cliffs."

"Just so; put the schooner for it as quick as her heels can carry her, and I'll take the helm, with your permission, and show you a trick that will make those Mexicans believe this is indeed a phantom yacht—the devil's own craft."

"All right, Nunez; here, helmsman, act under the command of the pilot."

The schooner had escaped unhurt by the iron hail sent after her, and by her wonderful speed, soon placed the point of land between her and her pursuers' guns, though their masts and sails could be seen above the rocks, as they hurried on in the chase, anxious to round the point, and again bring her under fire.

But as they rounded the land the schooner was nowhere visible; she had, as if by magic, entirely disappeared, and the astonished Mexicans could not account for it; but at length the bank of mist was discovered, and the commander of the fleet signaled to two of his vessels to keep to seaward of it, while the others would penetrate the dense mass of fog, and hunt out the specter-looking craft.

Again their hopes of capturing the schooner were raised, for they felt assured that she had hidden in the bank of fog, and that all avenues of escape would be cut off from her.

On they sailed, and while the two, obeying orders, kept to seaward of the fog, the others penetrated its mists and commenced the search.

Two hours were thus passed away, and at length, as if to aid them, the fog lifted, and was blown over upon the land, leaving the coast and ocean clear, but nowhere could be discovered the schooner; she had vanished like a specter; off from the land cruised the two Mexican vessels who were to watch for her escape from the fog, but they proved by their appearance that they had not seen the strange sail.

Signals were then made to search every inlet in the coast for miles, but toward evening, though many little bays and narrow channels indented the coast, there was no place discovered where even a small vessel could hide, and the search was given up; the superstitious Mexicans believing that she had either run herself under by her press of canvas, or was, in reality, a specter, and had rendered herself invisible.

Slowly the five cruisers put back toward their anchorage of the morning, and as they rounded the point of land darkness was coming on, but dimly in the distance, and in the very spot they had sailed from in the morning, was the white specter-outline of the strange schooner.

So nonplused were the Mexicans at the strange sight that for some moments not an order was given or a word said by either officers or men, and then the silence was broken upon the leading vessel by the stern voice of an officer who suddenly appeared on deck, and said:

"To your guns, men!" and turning to another officer, he ordered:

"Signal to the other vessels to prepare for action, and close in upon this impudent stranger."

But as he spoke, the vessel was no longer visible; then came a bluish flame, a flash of the same-hued light, which lit up the ghostly outlines of the schooner, and then the roar of heavy guns, fired in unison, and the whistling rush through the air of the iron hail, that, truly aimed, found a target in the hulls and rigging of the Mexican vessels, crashing

through oaken timbers, and laying dead and wounded upon the decks a number of the men.

All was consternation for the moment, and then the same stern voice was heard:

"Bring her broadside to bear, helmsman."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Now let her have it!" and the firing from that moment came brisk from the Mexicans, as they crowded into the little bay.

But what they were firing upon they could not tell, for the schooner, after the blue light that had rendered her visible, and the broadside hurled from her upon her approaching foes, had not been seen.

No answering fire greeted that of the Mexicans as they sailed into the inlet, and with watchful eyes searched on either shore.

A signal was given, the cruisers came to, the boats were manned, and long and anxiously every avenue of escape was searched, but still no clew could be found.

Here and there a narrow inlet, leading between lofty gateways of rocks, would wind from the bay into other channels, and so on perhaps for miles, but it would be foolish to think a vessel could go through them. Even if it were possible for her to enter the narrow gorges, no wind would fill her sails, and she could not get out again, reasoned the Mexicans, so with fears at their hearts that they were searching for a craft commanded by his Satanic Majesty, the seamen of the cruisers gladly obeyed the order to return to their vessels, and the hunt was given up.

The leading boat that went in search of the schooner was commanded by the same officer whose quiet courage had inspired his men.

Returning to the vessel he commanded, and which was the largest of the fleet, being a brig carrying fifteen guns, he beckoned to several of his officers to follow him, and descended into his cabin, which was large and comfortably furnished, and also surrounded with adornments of various kinds, which would indicate a cultivated taste in the one whose home it was.

As the bright light from the swinging lamp fell upon him, it lit up the fine form and dark handsome face of Adrian Vesta, the lieutenant who had so nobly defended his schooner against the Wanderer, and whom Claude had afterward left in command of his vessel.

Requesting his officers to be seated Captain Adrian Vesta, commander of the fine and fleet Mexican brig Tornado, said pleasantly, speaking in his native tongue:

"I asked you here, gentlemen, to have a talk with you regarding the strange *ignis fatuus* we have been pursuing to-day with such poor success. I have noticed that the men are of the belief that she is a schooner sailed by supernatural means, and this feeling in them must be put down.

"One or two of the officers, also, have given expression to the same feelings, and I am ashamed of them for so doing.

"The schooner is a reality; presenting a most specter-like appearance, I admit, and showing marvelous speed, and most wonderful skill in her management, and therefore our endeavors to take her must be so much greater than were we dealing with an ordinary vessel.

"By her great speed she escaped into that fog-bank this morning, before we could round the point and turn our guns upon her, and by some strange trick deceived us, and when we approached our anchorage the morning was quietly resting there.

"Now all this I admit is very hard to account for, but we must solve the mystery; we must take that schooner, or we will be the laughing-stock of the world.

"You remember I was second officer on board the schooner Nina, now one of this fleet, and which was captured off the coast of Maine by a daring little American yacht, who defeated us fairly after a hard fight?

"Well, this specter schooner is a *fac-simile*, excepting in color, of that daring little yacht.

"The rake of the masts is the same, the long, low, graceful hull, and in fact the general outline."

"Who was her commander?" asked one of the officers.

"That I do not know, nor is there such a vessel, that I can learn of, in the United States navy; a few days after leaving us the Zanzibar was blown up off the coast of Maine by a long, low, rakish schooner, that burnt a blue light upon her decks and then stood to sea," was the report in the American papers, and I believe that is the same vessel that has just escaped us."

The officers then engaged for some hours in planning their future movements, after which they dispersed for the night.

Adrian Vesta ascended to the deck of his vessel and looked around upon the still scene, and quiet waters, toward the land, and was turning to reënter his cabin when a glance seaward showed him the specter schooner rapidly gliding away upon the ocean.

In obedience to his startling orders, all on board was bustle and confusion, in preparations to up anchor, make sail, and start in pursuit of the specter, which was some miles distant flying away, wing and wing, before the wind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PILOT'S SKILL.

At the command of Claude, the helmsman resigned the wheel to Nunez, the newly-appointed pilot, and with his eyes ranging—alternately upon the sails of the yacht, and ahead upon the dense bank of fog they were approaching, the pilot kept the flying vessel steadily upon her course.

"Captain Alberti, will you please have the men in readiness to take in all extra sail, as soon as we enter the mist? for I wish to work landward until I reach an opening inlet which I knew well in years gone by."

The orders were given, and the men stood ready, and soon after the schooner dashed into the dense mist.

"Take in sail," was the quiet order of the pilot, and under reduced canvas, the speed of the vessel decreased greatly, though she still moved swiftly through the water.

"Now, captain, I will go forward and take my position upon the end of the bowsprit, and would like to suggest that you and Mr. May take the helm," said the pilot.

"Certainly, and as Mr. Leon has good eyes he can go forward with you—here, Pierre, go with the pilot, and Preston, aid me with the wheel," and relieving Nunez from his post, Claude and his lieutenant firmly grasped the wheel, while the pilot and Pierre went forward and stationed themselves upon the bowsprit.

The fog was now so dense that Claude could hardly distinguish the outlines of his vessel; but with perfect confidence in his pilot, he kept the yacht steadily on her course.

"Port," came in muffled tones from forward.

"Port it is," answered Claude, in the same subdued voice.

"Port."

"Port it is."

"Steady as you are."

"Ay, ay," and on the schooner sailed through the thick fog.

Some miles had been passed upon this course, no other order having come from forward, when the silence was again broken with:

"Starboard! hard! hard a-starboard!"

"Hard a-starboard 'tis," was Claude's answer.

"Lower away the mainsail," again came an order, and the men instantly obeyed.

Still quietly sailed the schooner, officers and men awaiting anxiously the next order.

It soon came.

"Lower away the foresail," and when this was done the schooner slowly moved on, under her jib alone.

"Port your helm."

"Port 'tis," and as the order was obeyed, Pierre Leon came aft, and said to Claude:

"The pilot wishes your gig for you and himself to go in, and the other boats to be lowered and gotten ready to tow the schooner in to shore."

"All right; give the orders, Mr. Minturn; here, Mr. Rivers, take my place at the wheel. Pierre, you accompany the pilot and myself."

In a few moments, Claude, Pierre and the pilot clambered into the gig, where four stout oarsmen had preceded them, and pulled away from the schooner, while the other boats, filled with men, were attached to the bow of the vessel, and slowly towed her after the gig.

Still the fog was so dense that nothing could be discerned at the distance of thirty yards, yet with confidence the pilot continued on until the shadowy outline of the land appeared in sight.

"Cease rowing," and the men raised their oars, when the pilot put his hand to his lips and gave a loud halloo, that was instantly thrown back by a dozen echoes.

For a moment Claude doubted his pilot, but then feeling assured he was wrong, he loosened his grasp upon his revolver, and was about to speak when Nunez said:

"I could not have hit this inlet better, if I had come when there was no fog: see yonder, Captain Alberti, that cliff in the distance; well, I found it by my call, which brought back an echo; fifty yards either way from this spot, you cannot produce an echo; therefore I am directly in front of the inlet," and raising his voice he called.

"Come on with the schooner!"

"Ay, ay," came from the boats, and indistinctly seen, the yacht approached.

"How are we to get out of this, Nunez?" asked Claude.

"Nothing easier, as I will show you," and turning to the boat's crew he said:

"Give way, men," and the gig moved on again, followed by the other boats towing the schooner.

With wonderful skill the pilot led the way, through reefs of rock that here and there were visible, until a narrow opening appeared in the shore, which upon nearer inspection proved to be the mouth of a small creek.

Up this narrow, but deep stream the schooner was towed for some distance, and then turning a bend, entered through another narrow passageway a small lake.

Across this sheet of water the pilot steered,

followed by the boats and yacht, and upon the other side an outlet was found, through which Nunez continued, for a quarter of a mile in silence, when he turned to Claude, who had calmly and without a word, trusted the lives of himself and crew in the hands of the strange man by his side, and remarked:

"In half an hour, Captain Alberti, I will show you something that you little dream of. It is still misty, but wait until we get out of this lagoon, which will be in a few minutes more," and as the boat went on, the fog grew gradually less dense, and soon disappeared, but a dark wall of trees bordered either side.

Still on, led the pilot, and gradually the lagoon widened until it emptied its waters into a small bay that ran inland from the ocean.

The schooner was soon brought up, and again Nunez led the way in the gig, for the distance of a mile, when, upon turning an arm of the bay, a view of the broad open Gulf was discovered, and the sight of which would have been hailed with a yell of joy from the men had not Claude motioned to them to keep silent.

"We are now in the harbor from which those Mexicans sailed in search of us," calmly said Nunez, saluting his commander.

Claude extended his hand, and grasping that of the pilot said:

"Nunez, you are a wonderful man, and I congratulate you upon the success of your daring undertaking. You have indeed played a trick upon the Mexicans."

"It has been a number of years since I last went that way, Captain Alberti, and those that were with me then are all dead; I do not believe a living man knows that a vessel can be taken through that land-locked channel."

"That is good—now we can lie here, until the return of those fellows, and while the schooner goes back, we can pay them a short visit in the boats, and then retreat," answered Claude, delighted at the advantage he had gained, through his pilot's skill, over his foes.

The boats once more were brought alongside the schooner, and all awaited the return of the frustrated Mexicans.

Darkness crept along over land and sea, and with it, appeared to seaward, the sails of the returning cruisers.

Upon the deck of the yacht Claude stood, with his officers, in consultation with the pilot.

"Captain Alberti, will you listen to a suggestion from me, sir?"

"Certainly, Nunez."

"Then I think we had better get sail on the schooner, let her put back and forth here until the Spaniards see her, then burn a blue-light upon her decks, and afterward retrace our way rapidly back through the lagoon, and putting to sea, run across the opening of the bay, in full sight of the fleet, while they are searching for us here, in their boats, as they will most assuredly do."

The proposition of the pilot was at once acquiesced in by Claude and his officers, and carried out, with what success the reader has already discovered.

After retracing her way through the circuitous route of the morning, and gaining the open sea, the yacht spread her white sails, and came in full view of the fleet, and was discovered by Captain Vesta, who at once gave orders for the cruisers to pursue the specter schooner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHASE.

ON flew the fleet yacht far ahead of her pursuers, which, as the night wore on, were all, excepting one, left miles astern.

The exception was a schooner somewhat larger than the Dare-Devil, and of a graceful and rakish model.

The moonlight shone full upon her cloud of white canvas, as she came rapidly on before a ten-knot breeze, about a mile and a half astern.

"Preston, put the Devil in full dress and show that Mexican we can run away from him, if we have a mind to, and after he is convinced, we will lay to and await his coming. I do not even see the other vessels," said Claude, scanning the horizon with his glass.

Under increased sail the yacht slowly forged away from the pursuer, and having divided the distance between them still more, Claude cried out:

"Take in sail, men, lively. Leave her under easy fighting canvas, Mr. Minturn."

"To your quarters, all," he added, after the yacht had furled some of her wide white wings.

Rapidly came on the pursuing schooner, and as she drew near, it could be seen that her guns were run out and she was ready for action.

"Preston, that is the same schooner we conquered off the coast of Maine. I wonder if that handsome and daring lieutenant commands her now? If so, we've got to fight."

"By George! Claude, you are right; it's the same schooner," answered Preston May, narrowly watching her through his glass.

"Nunez, take the helm," said Claude to the pilot, who was standing near, and he relieved the man at the wheel.

"Ah! Adina, this is a dangerous place for you. By Heaven! I'll not risk a battle with

you on board. Put her away before the wind, Nunez; lively, men, lively, and set every sail that will draw," and Claude's orders rung out loud and clear, for in his preparations to meet the Mexican, he had forgotten the danger in which he was placing Adina, until her coming upon deck had recalled it to him.

"Do not mind me, Captain Claude, I beg of you," said the brave girl, but Claude took no notice of her remark, and in stern tones urged the men to greater haste in setting sail.

Nimble they sprung to their work, and in less time than it has taken to relate, the yacht was literally covered with canvas, her fore and main-sails spread, wing and wing, and her bows plowing up white furrows as she cut through the water.

The Mexican schooner had evidently discovered the intention of the American to await his coming and offer battle, and was prepared also for the fray, but the unaccountable way in which the specter vessel suddenly spread sail, when not a mile divided them, and under the clouds of canvas flew away, took the Mexican totally by surprise; for they had also taken in sail when they noticed the yacht awaiting them, and when the Dare-Devil again rushed forward upon her course, the hostile schooner was fast left astern.

At length the Mexican commander ordered the bow gun turned upon the yacht, and the heavy boom rolled across the waters.

"They have at last found their senses, and are treating us to some music; it must be a *solo* however, for I will not return their fire," remarked Claude to Preston.

"They are piling on sail again, captain, to see if they cannot catch us," remarked the pilot, casting a look astern.

"She is a fast schooner, but the Dare-Devil can outsail her hand over hand," rejoined Pierre Leon, joining the group, and then turning to his commander he remarked:

"Claude, I sincerely thank you for your kindness in not fighting while Adina is on board. I feared for awhile you had forgotten her presence."

"In the excitement of an anticipated combat, I had. There is nothing to thank me for, however, Pierre, I but did my duty; and at another time we can try the metal of that Mexican. Look, that was a good shot; it nearly took our topmast off!"

"Well, we will not be much longer in range," answered Pierre.

"No; and then I intend to put the schooner for that part of the coast nearest to the home of Adina's relatives, and there we can land her; but how will she reach them?" asked Claude.

"I speak Spanish perfectly you know, Claude, and have with me a passport from the French Government; this will protect me, and I can escort her into the interior; that is, if you can spare me."

"Certainly I will, old fellow, in such a good cause, and Nunez can no doubt hide us away in some quiet nook on the coast until you return."

"That can I, captain, especially if the landing is to be made anywhere along the shores of Campeachy Bay," rejoined the pilot.

"It is along the shores of Campeachy, Nunez, and those whom I would seek live some thirty miles in the interior," answered Pierre.

"Then all will be easy, for I know where we can go with the yacht, and where you can also get horses to go upon your trip."

"My good Nunez, you are invaluable; stand on as you are, until that Mexican is hulled down, and then put the schooner away for the mouth of the Alvarado river," said Claude.

"Ay, ay, sir; we'll soon make that craft give up the chase, and I believe they have already concluded not to waste any more ammunition upon us, since that last shot fell so far astern."

"I believe you are right; come, gentlemen, supper awaits us," and Claude and his officers descended into the cabin, leaving the yacht swiftly bounding over the moonlit ocean, her pursuer being far astern.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DANGEROUS UNDERTAKING.

"LAND HO!" came from the lookout at the mast-head of the Dare-Devil, upon the evening of the second day of her flight from the Mexican schooner, and the cry soon brought all the officers to the quarter-deck.

"Well, Nunez, yonder rises the land; can you go in by night, for dark will overtake us long before we can get to an anchorage?"

"Yes, sir, I can run her into the harbor where I am going, the darkest night that ever visited this coast; I can go through the channel here, as you did that one on the Maine coast, the night you saved the yacht," answered the pilot.

"Well, we'll stand right on; the place you refer to will hide a vessel in the daytime as well as night. I hope, for I do not wish to put to sea leaving Lieutenant Leon on land."

"We can bide there for months, captain, and if you will go up with me to the house of the fisherman I once knew, you can see the lieutenant and the young lady safely off for the interior."

"I will accompany you," and no more conversation was held upon the subject.

The land soon became plainly visible, and the yacht stood up the coast for a few miles, and then the pilot went forward and took his stand upon the bowsprit, and then called out:

"Helmsman, put her in toward the land, and point her toward that high hill yonder."

The bowsprung round, and slowly the schooner approached nearer and nearer the dark coast, until the roar of the surf upon the shore could be distinctly heard.

"Here, my man, go aft and ask Captain Alberti to come forward," and soon Claude stood beside the pilot.

"Captain Alberti, do you see that rocky point, one point off our starboard bow?"

"Yes, it rises far above our masts."

"Just so, sir; now to the left of that is a salt river, that winds inland for half a mile, is broad, deep and clear of all obstructions, and there is where I am going to take the schooner; from that high point of land a lookout can command a view of the coast both ways for miles, and look far out to sea, so it is impossible to be caught napping; on the land side, it is impossible to get to the basin where the schooner will anchor, unless you go miles below and take a boat, nor can she be seen from the land; yes, there is another way, but it is known to but two persons, myself and the old fisherman, whom, if living, we will see to night; that way, captain, I will carry you in the gig, and you will then see what a safe *rendezvous* you have for your vessel upon the coast of Mexico; now, for fear some accident may happen to me, let me teach you how to pilot the vessel into the basin, for it is a dangerous channel; took me two years to learn it, and yet I can teach it to you by once going through it. Had you not best call one of your officers to learn it also?"

"Yes, I will; send Mr. Leon forward here, one of you men," called out Claude; and when Pierre joined them upon the fore-castle, the pilot remarked:

"Lieutenant, I am going to show the captain and yourself how to run in through this channel to a safe anchorage. Steady there at the helm."

"You both observe that point of rocks? Well, when the advance of the schooner brings it in a line with the top of that distant hill, seen against the horizon yonder, you must bring the bow of the yacht up, so as to bear directly in the line between the two, and continue on this course until you have slowly counted two hundred and fifty; now they come together; Starboard your helm, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir—"

"Steady!—now count."

"Steady it is," answered Preston May, for he had taken the wheel.

"Port your helm—bring up three points! now count one hundred slowly"—the first part of the order was to the helmsman, in a loud tone, the latter addressed to Claude and Pierre, who stood narrowly watching the pilot, and with pencil and paper jotting down his instructions.

"Hard-a-starboard! now count fifty."

"Hard-a-starboard 'tis," came from Preston.

"Hard a port—count seventy-five."

"Steady!—count three hundred."

"Hard! hard-a-starboard! now, when she has just time to come round."

"Hard, hard-a-port!—count one hundred."

"Ay, ay," answered Preston.

"Steady—count one hundred."

"Steady it is!"

"Hard down with your helm."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Steady," and as the pilot gave the last order the schooner floated into the broad stream the pilot had spoken of, and upon either side were high rugged banks, impassable to the foot of man or beast.

"Now, gentlemen, you are in a safe harbor; doubly so, for neither the elements nor man can find you here; the channel through which we have just come is treacherous and dangerous, but if you follow my directions, after bringing the point of land and the distant hill on either side your bows, you can come in with your eyes closed."

"I believe you, Nunez; you are a most wonderful pilot," and the three walked aft, after orders had been given to let go the anchor.

It could be seen that the pilot had greatly risen in the eyes of all on board, by his last exploit, although he had been looked upon as no ordinary man, ever since his pilotage of the schooner through the lagoons and lake, to bring her again into the ocean, miles from the place where she had entered the inlet.

"Now, sir, we will go ashore, if you are ready; you need not take any men, sir, I will row the gig."

"As you like, Nunez; Pierre, is Adina ready?"

"Yes, Claude, all ready," and Pierre went into the yacht's cabin to tell her all was in readiness for her departure.

He found the young girl weeping, for it was a sad thing for her to give up those with whom she had passed so many happy days, and to go

among those who were strangers to her, although of her own blood.

With a sad heart she bade farewell to the officers, waved an adieu to the men, who offered many a kind wish for her safety and happiness, and then stepped into the little boat, where Nunez sat oars in hand, and Claude stood ready to receive her.

Pierre then sprung into the boat, and away the light shell darted from the schooner's side, urged by the strong arms of the pilot.

Pulling for half a mile up the stream, the pilot turned the gig under a dark mass of overhanging rock, and laying aside his oars, said:

"Lieutenant, if you will sit on the port side and merely urge the boat forward by pushing against the rocks, I will do the same on the starboard."

Pierre obeyed, and the boat soon moved into the opening in the rocks and was in one instant in total darkness.

"This is a tunnel under the hills, Nunez, is it not?" asked Claude.

"Yes, sir, one mile and a half long, and about five feet wide, and as many high; on our way back the boat will float through with the stream."

It seemed to Adina as if the midnight gloom of the tunnel would never end, but at length there appeared light, and the boat came out in a little basin fed by a dashing cataract, which fell in torrents over the mouth of the cavern, completely hiding it from view.

"Now throw your tarpaulins around you, for we leave the boat here, and have to go through this fall of water," and Nunez led the way, followed by the others, Adina being supported upon the slippery rocks by both Claude and Pierre.

Soon they emerged, and the beauty around them struck all with admiration.

The stars shone brilliantly, and the night seemed far less dark, when compared with the blackness of the tunnel; around them were groves of trees, in their front was a broad plain, while in the distance was a range of mountains.

"This is indeed lovely," said Adina, looking around her, while Nunez answered:

"Yes, miss; but we must get on—it is two miles from here to where Bozzaro lives, and it will be a rough walk for you, and we must be careful, for we are in the Mexican country now, and liable to come upon a *ranchero* at any moment," so with caution they walked on in silence, the pilot leading the way over hill and through valley, until they came in sight of a low hut, from the square window of which shone a dim light.

"Rest here while I go forward and stir up old Bozzaro—*Sacra!* what the deuce is this?" and with a harsh growl a large dog sprung upon the pilot, who grappled with him, a flash of descending steel and with a low whine the great brute was dead.

"Are you hurt, Nunez?" asked Claude, springing forward, for so sudden and unexpected had been the attack, that neither he nor Pierre had been able to aid the pilot.

"No, sir; but I've done for the dog; these must be bad times when old Bozzaro has to guard his home with such savages as that. Now wait,"—and coolly wiping his knife, Nunez walked away, leaving Claude, his lieutenant, and Adina to await his return.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BOZZARO, THE FISHERMAN.

THE pilot had been gone for half an hour, and Claude and his companions were commencing to feel uneasy at his long stay, when he was suddenly seen approaching.

"Come on, all safe," he said, joining the group, and he led the way to the fisherman's hut, which was situated upon the summit of a little hill that sloped away from the point, but formed the steep bank of a small stream at the back of the house.

Claude glanced at the low stone hut, that contained but two rooms, each room having but one door and window, the door of the left-hand room opening in the front of the house, and the door of the room upon the right opening upon the rear, and but ten feet distant from the steep bank of the stream.

A low knock at the rear entrance was answered by an invitation to enter, and pushing open the door, Nunez stepped in, followed by the others of the party.

"These are my friends, Bozzaro," said the pilot to the fisherman, who was a powerfully-formed man, over six feet in height, and with a long, flowing iron-gray beard, and white hair, that gave him a venerable look; though a glance into the dark face, the bright, black eyes, and the firm expression of his countenance, proved that age had not whitened his locks.

"I am glad to meet your friends; Bozzaro's home shall be theirs, if they need it," said the fisherman in a deep voice, speaking in his native tongue, but then changing to English, which he spoke fluently, he continued:

"I forgot that I speak to those who may not understand my tongue—you are all welcome to my humble home."

"I thank you, Bozzaro; we all here speak

Spanish I believe, and together are grateful for your kindness. Nunez has brought us hither, feeling assured you will do us a great service for the sake of your old friendship for him," answered Claude.

"The pilot and myself have roughed many a storm together. A tie binds us that death alone can sever; his friends are my friends; his enemies are my enemies; in serving him, I serve myself; he has already explained to me your wishes, and my boy has gone after horses for the expedition, and will soon return and shall act as the guide of the young lady and lieutenant into the interior. I know the place well, I know the family, and a noble one it is; but one request I must make, and I feel from what Nunez has told me, that woman though she be, she will keep her word—she must promise me that she will not tell upon what part of the coast she landed, by whom guided to her future home, nor ever mention the names of Nunez Valdona or Bozzaro Amidon to a Mexican."

"I promise faithfully, and shall keep my promise sacredly, Bozzaro," said Adina, speaking softly in the Mexican tongue, and with the impulsiveness of her nature, she extended both hands to the fisherman in token of her sincerity.

"It is well, señorita; Bozzaro will ever be your friend, and as Silva Elverson guides you to-night to your uncle's ranch, watch well the way, that in case of need, you may again find the home of the fisherman."

"These are dark days to Mexico, child; our country is struggling with a powerful nation; it is the destiny of Mexico to become a part of the United States, but the time has not yet come, for our natures love strife and bloodshed too much, to become a quiet people, until the world becomes sickened with our crimes, and forces us to make what we can, if driven to it, a noble, industrious, peace-loving nation. Internal strife will be our fate until we drive from our midst the bigots and crime-stained men who rule us, and become one of the States of the great American Republic. In serving your friends here, you will be serving Mexico, so let no false thought of your patriotism prevent you from aiding the United States all in your power, for when the starry flag rises over our country, peace and prosperity will ever reign! I have talked thus long to you, and thus plainly, child, for I have learned from Nunez your past life, and through him I know all concerning the schooner and her crew; now all of you partake of some refreshments, and by that time Silva will be here with the horses."

While the venerable-looking fisherman was talking to Adina, she had looked him steadily in the eye, and shown her appreciation of his words to her by the honest expression upon her face; while Claude and Pierre stood by silently contemplating the remarkable-looking man before them, and listening with the greatest interest to his words.

Claude stepped forward when Bozzaro concluded his remarks, and said, earnestly:

"You are indeed our friend. I will trust you as thoroughly as I trust Nunez."

"I thank you, captain—Hush! it is Silva returning—to prove my trust of you, let me tell you that I am in direct communication with your generals. The boy, Silva, as I call him, is a colonel in the United States army, promoted to such for his daring and valuable secret services to your Government. See here," and the fisherman stepped upon a certain slab in the flooring, which slid back, revealing a narrow stairway.

"Through that passage, captain, I can go under ground to the stream that runs by my door; in the other end of the cavern are several boats, and the mouth of the cave is so hidden as to prevent discovery by the closest search; also through this narrow passageway I can go under ground two miles, until I come out in the water tunnel through which your boat floated, on her way hither to-night; then in the basin where your ship now lies I have a small fifteen-ton schooner, ready at a moment's time to put to sea, and she is so arranged that I can work her myself, without aid; in the stream there, back of my door, lies my fishing-craft, a small sloop, and though Silva and myself follow our trade, and sell fish in the distant markets, we are also 'fishermen of men,' if those men are Mexicans; now let me not forget a certain duty. Nunez killed one of my dogs to-night, but I have two more, and I will introduce them to you, that in future you may not fear them; here, Santa, Anna," and two enormous and ferocious-looking Russian bloodhounds sprang up from the cellar and crouched at Bozzaro's feet.

"Get acquainted with these friends of mine, Santa, Anna," and the fisherman motioned for the dogs to arise, and obeying him, they both turned and looked around at the small group, and the one addressed as Santa instantly walked over toward Adina, who laid her little hand timidly upon his head.

"He will not harm you, señorita; they will instantly know any of you, if you should not come again for months, and never hurt you, because they know that you are friends of mine; but woe to those to whom I do not introduce them. See, they make no disturbance at

the noise outside, for their keen scent has told them that Silva is there, and they know that nothing is wrong, but their howlings would have aroused the dead had those horses approached without him."

The dogs were petted by one and all of the party, and the fisherman then ordered them back into their retreat and closed the slab, while Claude, Pierre and Adina gazed with renewed respect upon the strange man before them.

Nunez, who seemed thoroughly acquainted with every part of the hut, had prepared a supper of strong coffee, wines, bread and butter and fruit, and at an invitation all sat down, to partake of the repast; after which Nunez stepped out to look after the horses, to give Silva an opportunity to prepare for his trip as guide into the interior of the country.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SILVA, THE GUIDE.

WHEN Bozzaro had spoken of Silva as "the boy," Claude and Pierre had believed him a mere youth, and were astonished when they heard he bore the commission of a colonel in the United States army, and wondered why one so young could be thus advanced; but when the door opened and Silva Elverson stood before them they no longer wondered that the man who entered could bear that title.

With an easy grace, a refinement worthy of the drawing-room, and a frank manner, the young man bowed to Adina, and offered his hand to Claude and Pierre, when Bozzaro presented him.

All were amazed at the remarkable beauty, for it could be called nothing else, even when applied to a man, of the man before them, both in face and form. Yet, though his face, devoid of all beard, looked youthful in the extreme, and there was a certain delicate look about his frame, and an almost womanly sweetness in his eyes, and upon his mouth, there rested however upon his countenance a decided expression of firmness, decision and daring, which men skilled in reading human nature, as were Claude and Pierre, could not fail to notice.

He was dressed in a dark blue pair of pants, a pea-jacket of the same shade, but of a heavier material, and a gray woolen shirt with the collar large and turned back, while a black silk scarf was tied in a sailor's knot around his neck.

From his head he had taken, upon entering the hut, a soft black hat or sombrero.

No sign of firearms could be seen upon his person, and yet it was but fair to think that a man of his metal would be prepared against all dangers that might beset his path.

"I am ready, señorita and señor, whenever you care to command me," he said, in indolent, quiet tones, that had a certain fascination in them, and Claude at once felt drawn toward the young man by feelings of the warmest friendship.

"And I also am ready, señor," said Adina, while she prepared for the journey.

"Silva, this is the commander of the *Dare-Devil*, that Nunez spoke to us of," remarked Bozzaro to the young man.

"Indeed; from what Nunez says of his experience and daring, I would not have thought him so youthful," returned Silva Elverson, gazing with undisguised admiration upon the handsome face of Claude.

"I thank both Nunez and yourself for the compliment, colonel, for Bozzaro tells me you bear that title; I am, like yourself, an officer in the service of the United States, and am determined, with the limited means at my command, to do all I can for country and fame; together we no doubt can do much good."

"True, far more than you can dream of; now give me your orders, captain, regarding our trip to-night, and though not wishing to be lacking in hospitality, I must say it is time for us to start," and the youth bowed to Adina.

"My instructions are simple; Miss Gomez is anxious to go to her uncle's ranch; my lieutenant here, will escort her there; you, colonel, command the forces, and I hope to meet yourself and Pierre here to-morrow night."

"We will be here, *Deo volente*," and after a word to Bozzaro, Colonel Elverson offered his hand to Adina, and leading her to her horse, lightly raised her into the saddle.

Adios were soon spoken, Adina throwing a parting kiss to Claude, and the three dashed away and were soon lost in the darkness.

Bozzaro, Claude and Nunez again entered the cabin, and seating themselves at a table they passed an hour or more in planning and plotting for further movements, by land and sea, against the Mexicans.

"To-morrow night Nunez and myself will be here by nine o'clock, and I would like, with your permission, to bring another of my officers with me," said Claude.

"Certainly, captain, for I know I can place confidence in your judgment," returned the fisherman.

"Now, Nunez, we must be on our way; but, hold! Bozzaro, who is Colonel Elverson? Do not consider me impertinent, but I have taken

a wonderful liking to the handsome and brave young man, and would know more of him."

"Captain, all I can tell you about him is this: Fifteen years ago I was sailing along the coast in my schooner, and saw a dark object upon the water, and far out from the shore. I went to it—it contained three dead bodies, two seamen, and a lovely woman, and upon her bosom lay a boy of five or six, as I believed, also dead; he was not, however, for under my careful nursing he revived, and Colonel Elverson is that little boy. His mother lies buried yonder in that grove of trees, for I placed her there that her boy might visit her grave; the two seamen I consigned to sailor's grave, beneath the waves."

"Had he no clew about him as to who he was?"

"Yes; therein is my crime toward him; letters, a locket with his father's miniature, a watch with his mother's name engraved in it, all these I have; but I have kept them from him, for fear he would leave me, and I could not give him up. I have taught him to be a sailor, to be a soldier, as far as drill could make him one, to fence, to be a crack shot, to speak English, French and Spanish, in fact educated him, for I was not in other days, Captain Alberti, what I now am, and I could not see him go from us as years creep on apace; he knows he is not my son, he knows how I found him, but he does not know who he is, or that there is any clew by which he can trace his relations. Now, let me lead you back to your boat by the underground way; come," and causing the slab to slide back as before, Bozzaro took a lighted taper and led the way into the vault.

A long tedious walk it was underground, but at length the sound of the cataract was heard, and soon after the three came out into the water tunnel, only a few feet from where the gig lay moored.

Shaking hands with the fisherman, and warmly thanking him for his kindness to him, Claude stepped into the boat, and was followed by Nunez, who with an oar shoved it away from the bank, when seized by the current it glided down the tunnel, and a bend hid from view the venerable-looking fisherman and his flaming light.

On through the darkness the gig floated, until it at last came out in the basin where lay at anchor the schooner, and a few moments after, and just as day was breaking, Claude stepped upon the decks of his vessel, and both he and the pilot sought the repose they so much needed after their long and adventurous trip of the night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MAKING LOVE ON HORSEBACK.

PIERRE had followed a suggestion made to him by Bozzaro, and had changed his uniform for the suit of a civilian and his naval cap for a sombrero.

Both he and Silva were well armed and Adina also carried a small revolver, given to her by Claude, before starting, and the three being mounted on swift and strong horses they were well prepared for any ordinary dangers that might beset their paths.

Colonel Elverson rode in advance, some fifteen or twenty paces from his companions, whose horses moved swiftly along, side by side, their riders holding them well in hand, ready at a moment's warning from their guide to check them.

The road was passably good, leading over hill and valley, bordering deep forests and then penetrating their midst, and though the way was not discernible to the eyes of Pierre or Adina, the guide seemed never at a fault, but at the same steady gallop urged his horse forward, ever and anon turning slightly in his saddle to see how closely he was followed by his companions.

"How fortunate it was, Pierre, that you insisted upon bringing to the Corsair's Paradise those two horses taken on that merchant brig by Don Pedro; and that you taught me how to ride, otherwise I could not have undertaken this trip to-night," said Adina, who sat her horse with infinite grace, and handled the reins with skill and firmness.

"Yes, Adina, it was fortunate; Don Pedro wished to throw the horses overboard, but my father made him yield to my entreaties to save them; how many a pleasant gallop we had over the island with them."

"Yes, indeed we did, and how I missed you when you went away, Pierre," and the lovely eyes shone brightly upon him even in the darkness.

"Missed me, Adina?" and the usually quiet tones of the young privateersman trembled as he spoke.

"Indeed I missed you, Pierre, and cried my eyes almost out when you were gone," innocently responded the maiden.

"And yet the bath of tears you gave them but made them far more bright and beautiful, Adina."

"A compliment from you, Pierre."

"The truth, only, Adina."

"Pierre, I felt that you would one day come back to the island and save me from my sad fate; that some day you would restore me to those that have the right to claim me, and it was so noble in Captain Claude to come with you; how can I ever repay the kindness of yourself and your brother officers for all you have done for me?"

"Adina, I always determined, after my flight from the island, the night I was arrested by Don Pedro, to return for you; but circumstances over which I had no control prevented; but you were ever present in thought, and in all my wanderings your bright young image cheered me, and I knew that I loved you—"

"Of course you love me, Pierre; I should be very miserable if I believed to the contrary."

"You misunderstand my meaning, Adina; I loved you when a little girl you were wont to be ever near me; I loved you when you became a woman, as I do now, with all the passion, all the idolatry of my nature. Your purity has prevented me from being wicked; your happiness has been my aim, and though I have never before this shown to you other than the love of a brother, I have felt deep in my heart that no other woman's image could ever rest there."

"There you are engraven indelibly, there you will remain as long as life lasts."

"I would not speak thus to you upon the schooner, for I wished to leave you untrammelled to act for yourself; I saw that another there had learned to love you, that you had won his entire devotion, and I determined to forget self, and place no obstacle in your way, so that you might judge whether you returned his love; that you declined to accept the hand of Oscar Minturn I know, for almost broken-hearted the brave fellow rushed to his stateroom before you left, and deeply did I feel for his anguish, for I, too, feared the same blow might fall upon me."

"Then, Adina, I believed that you loved Claude, and had he sought you, not a word would I have said against it; you should have been his wife, you should have been my little sister."

"But Claude sought not your hand; another love, over which some strange gloom has of late fallen, fills his heart."

"Poor, poor Claude; I pity him from my heart, Pierre," broke from the maiden, and at her words a look of agony, which the darkness hid, came upon her companion's face."

"I also pity him, Adina; but when I saw that no word of love passed between you—"

"Pierre, I love Claude as I would my brother, had I one; I unintentionally overheard a conversation in the cabin between him and Lieutenant May, and thereby I learned a dark page in his life's history; because he has suffered, because the iron has entered deep into his soul, I love him the more, but only as a sister should love a brother."

"My God, I thank Thee!" broke from the stern man's lips, and then he continued:

"Adina, you know that I would willingly give you to Claude, if it added to your and his happiness."

"I know you would, you dear good fellow."

"I wished that you should love him; but I longed that you should love me more."

"And I do, Pierre."

"How do you love me, little darling?"

"As I never did, as I never can love another being in this world, Pierre."

"You come to me with every bright joy of my childhood, you come to me in a very happy dream of my mother. In my childish sorrows you shared, in my girlhood's joys, and afterward in my womanhood's pleasures you were ever present."

"I have loved you, Pierre, from the time you first were kind to my poor mother and myself, and to-night only, when you have spoken of my loving other men, have I found out how I love you." Adina had spoken passionately, her right hand extended toward Pierre and occasionally resting upon his bride-arm, and as she ceased speaking he clasped the gloved hand within his own and said gently:

"Your words, Adina, give me more joy than I ever hoped to feel in this world; you know the bitter blots that stained my young life, you knew all that I could tell you, and yet you love me; you will be my wife one of these days in the future, if we both live, will you not, Adina?"

"I will, Pierre; God willing, from this moment I am your promised wife."

"Thank you, darling."

Then a silence, a joy too deep for words, fell upon them, and they rode on, following steadily the lead of the dark form in advance, as with unerring knowledge he followed the windings of the forest road.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AMBUSHED BY THE ROADSIDE.

For the first time since the small party, on horseback, had left the cabin of Bozzaro, then ten miles behind them, the dark form in front of the two lovers was seen to draw rein, and his hand was raised above his head as a warning for caution.

As Pierre and Adina rode alongside of Colonel Elverson, he remarked:

"I have believed for some time we were watched, and now I am assured of it."

"What has caused you to think so, colonel?" asked Pierre.

"Pardon me, if I suggest that you leave off my title; I am simply Silva, the son of old Bozzaro, the fisherman; but to answer your question, I have noticed ahead of me now and then a moving figure on horseback, and then it would appear upon one side, and then the other, and this circumstance made me cautious, and I have settled in my mind who my spy, or spies, are. I am suspected by the Mexicans of being engaged in some secret service, but they have never been able to trace me, but three fellows have been for some time hanging upon my steps. Doubtless I was tracked when I went to the ranch after the horses, and these fellows have kept on our path ever since."

"Now, I know where they are lying in wait for us, and I wish you to let me ride on some three hundred yards in advance; this will draw their fire upon me, and then, sir, at the report of arms you can come on as rapidly as you please to my aid."

"I will do so; I dislike to see you go alone, but would share the danger with you," answered Pierre.

"I am used to fighting my own battles unaided, thank you, and besides, Mr. Leon, you must remain close by the side of Señorita Gomez, to protect her; here, in case accident befall me, is a chart of your way to the Delavan ranch, the home of the señorita's uncle; you can easily find it now, for we are over the intricate parts of the road; now I will ride on rapidly, while you follow slowly," and with a wave of his hand Silva urged his horse forward at a swift gait, while Pierre and Adina followed him more leisurely, both ready for an attack, if any were made."

For half a mile they continued their way in silence, each moment fearing to hear the report of firearms, and anxiously fearing some danger might befall their brave guide."

Soon their ears were greeted by four or five shots fired in rapid succession, and then followed by two quick, ringing reports, which Pierre knew came from the American revolver."

"Come, Adina, our guide's in danger," and on the two dashed at the full speed of their horses, the maiden firmly grasping her reins in one hand, sitting erect in her saddle, and in her right hand holding the pistol Claude had given her."

"I do hope no harm has come to him," said Adina, anxiously, while she urged her horse forward."

"I sincerely hope not," and the tones of Pierre's voice had a ring in them that betokened danger to those who opposed him, and gathering more firmly his reins, he drew his pistol and settled himself in the saddle in a way that showed he meant fight."

"Take care! draw up, Adina," he called out, as a horseman suddenly dashed around a bend in the road; but in an instant he saw that it was not Silva, and he called out:

"Halt, sir, or I fire!"

A shot from the horseman was the answer as he attempted to ride by, and then another, but Pierre drew his horse across the road, leveled his pistol, fired, and the man reeled, fell from his saddle, and hanging by his foot in the stirrup, was dragged away by the affrighted steed that bounded off through the woods."

Again the sound of hoofs was heard, and in readiness Pierre awaited, having told Adina to ride upon one side of the road, and the next instant another horseman dashed around the curve, his form erect, his whole attitude that of a man who would ride down anything that barred his passage."

"Ha! Silva, it is you?" called out Pierre, recognizing him at a glance."

"Yes. I heard your shot and came to your assistance; no one hurt, I hope?" said Colonel Elverson, wheeling his horse alongside of Adina."

"No, and yourself? we were coming to your aid when that fellow dashed upon us."

"Yes, he escaped from me by my horse falling; where is he?"

"Dead, for I shot him from the saddle, and his horse dragged him away."

"Good; señorita, you are not much frightened, I hope? the danger is over, now."

"No; I was frightened, but it was for fear you or Pierre might get wounded."

"I did get a slight scratch here in my arm; fortunately it is no worse," and the colonel bared his left arm, and showed where a pistol-ball had cut away the flesh, leaving a painful, but not serious wound."

"I am so sorry; I am a good surgeon, having had considerable practice, so dismount and I will dress it for you," and with a bound the fair girl was upon her feet, handkerchief in hand, and ready to show her skill as a surgeon."

"Ahead, a hundred yards, we will find a small lake, and there I shall resign myself to your tender mercies," responded the colonel, pleasantly, and they proceeded to the small sheet of water, near the edge of which Adina started at observing two dark forms lying upon the ground."

"Only the bodies of those two Mexicans I finished," said Colonel Elverson, coolly, seeing her movement, and then he continued:

"There were four of them; two lie there, one Lieutenant Leon sent to the Devil—pardon me, señorita, home, I mean—and one escaped in the darkness; we will not be troubled again to-night; now you may tie this arm up for me, and we will hasten on, for daylight may catch us yet."

Tenderly, and with an experience that long practice in binding up the wounds of the corsairs when left upon the island, helpless, after a battle, had taught her, Adina soon dressed the wounded arm, and with the aid of Pierre, carefully bound it up, the colonel quietly smoking in the most nonchalant manner, during the operation, and praising her dexterity."

Both Pierre and Adina were delighted with the cool courage and total disregard of pain shown by the effeminate-looking man before them, but they had seen him tried, and felt confident that no man lived who would dare more than would Colonel Silva Elverson."

With renewed confidence in their guide, Pierre and Adina felt more at ease regarding the remaining portion of their journey, and the wound having been dressed, the horses much refreshed by their rest, and the bodies of the two Mexicans pulled to one side of the road into the shadow of the woods, the party mounted, and again pressed rapidly on, the colonel, as before, leading the way, and after a two hours' ride, came in sight, just as the sun arose, of the walls of a house in the distance, and which, Silva said, was the Delavan ranch."

CHAPTER XXX.

DELAVAN RANCH.

"ADINA, I had better go forward now and see your uncle, and tell him of your history; regarding myself, as I bear a foreign passport, and the United States is at war with Mexico, I cannot, of course, say I am now an American."

"With regard to our meeting, I will simply say, that I was also captured by the corsairs, and escaped from the island."

"It were better so, Pierre, and yet it is all true. I will remain here with Colonel—I mean with Silva," and that being settled Pierre rode forward toward the house, a long, flat-looking building, built of stone, but surrounded by handsome grounds, gardens, and outbuildings that betokened the home of a Mexican of the best class of society."

Approaching the front of the house, Pierre dismounted and was hitching his horse, when a pleasant voice greeted him with:

"I bid you good-morning, señor."

The lieutenant returned the greeting, and saw that the speaker was a man of apparently forty years of age, of slight stature, and possessing a pleasing face and bright eye."

"I would see Señor Delavan," said Pierre."

"He stands before you, señor; I am just going into the house to partake of my morning repast, having returned from an early walk; you will join me, of course, and if your mission is one of business we will discuss that afterward; it's never right to talk of matter-of-fact affairs upon an empty stomach," and the Mexican laughed pleasantly."

"I agree with you in that, señor; but I must beg of you to listen to me one moment, for what I have to say is of the utmost importance, both to you and to another person."

"Ah! say you so? What is it then? No evil I hope," and a shade of anxiety crept over the Mexican's cheerful face."

"You had a sister, by name Adina Delavan."

"God rest her soul, I had."

"You knew that she was dead, then?"

"I know that the ship in which herself, her husband and their child sailed, foundered at sea and all were lost," said the Mexican, sadly."

"The ship did not founder at sea, Señor Delavan."

"Madre de Dios! you trifle with me; not a word has ever come from one who sailed in her."

"There are other dangers upon the ocean besides storm and shipwreck."

"What then; what fate befell my darling sister?" entreated the Mexican."

"She is dead, and is buried in a far-off clime; her husband, Señor Gomez, died fighting to defend his wife and child, and found a grave in the ocean; the ship was taken by pirates off the coast of Algiers."

"By pirates—oh, Heaven, be merciful; and the child, the little señorita?" cried the Mexican, earnestly."

"She lives, she is now a woman, and awaits but your voice to come to you, and then you shall know all—"

"Where, where is she? hasten tell me that I may go to her; here, Spado, my horse, quick," and while the startled servant ran for his master's steed, Pierre told Señor Delavan more of Adina's past life, and was delighted to see how rejoiced the Mexican would be to receive, as his own daughter, the child of his beloved sister, whose untimely fate he had so long mourned."

The horse was soon brought, and mounting in haste the two rode rapidly off, in the direction

in which Pierre had left Colonel Elverson and Adina to await his return.

They had dismounted from their horses, and were standing in the edge of a copse of woods, watching for the coming of Pierre; and while they were waiting there, Silva had given the maiden some insight into the character of her uncle, whom he had often met before, and encouraged her to hope for a warm welcome from him.

Soon they discovered Pierre and the Mexican approaching at a rapid gallop, and the lovely face of Adina paled and flushed with hope and fear.

Drawing rein near them the two dismounted, and advancing Pierre said:

"Señor, this is your niece, the Señorita Adina."

"My own darling child, you are indeed the daughter of my loved sister. Come, Adina, and my home shall be your home," and he infolded the weeping maiden in his arms, and for some moments not a word was spoken, and then the Mexican, still holding Adina's hand, said:

"But, in my joy in welcoming you back as it were from the dead, I must not forget my hospitality. Come, ho! Silva, you are the guide, are you, that has brought this treasure to my lonely hacienda; thank you many times for your kindness; come, Adina, come señors, let me welcome you to my house; I am an old bachelor, Adina, but you can soon make sunshine come into my home," and with joy at his heart, Don Clio Delavan gallantly assisted his niece to her saddle, and mounting his horse led the way to the house.

A pleasant party sat down to breakfast that morning in the Delavan hacienda, and the whole past history of Adina was made known to her uncle, excepting the fact that she had been brought to Mexico by an American cruiser; for Silva had come to the rescue nobly, when the Don asked how she had reached Mexico, by saying:

"Bozzaro was out in his sloop fishing, and was hailed by an English vessel and took on board the señorita and Mr. Leon, and he told them I would guide them to your hacienda—"

"Right, Silva, and I am more than indebted to you," and the Mexican's whole face beamed with the joy he felt.

It was arranged that Pierre and Leon should remain at the hacienda during the day, and at nightfall retrace their way to the coast, the guide telling the Mexican that Bozzaro had promised to take the French gentleman, Pierre, in his sloop to Vera Cruz from which place he could get passage to Havana, with her Pierre said he was bound.

During the day, the lieutenant of the Dare-Devil held a long conversation with the Mexican, and told him of his love for his niece, and of her promise to become his wife at some future day, and asked his sanction.

"You have most certainly won the right to claim her; you have my full consent and best wishes," was the hearty rejoinder of Don Delavan.

The lovers also enjoyed a long talk together, and it was arranged that Adina should decide whether to tell, at some future day, after she had learned to know her uncle better, the truth in regard to Pierre's being an officer in the service of the United States.

Night came on apace, and after a sad parting with Adina, and a warm grasp of the hand to Don Delavan, Pierre and Silva mounted their horses and rode away in the direction of the coast, Adina watching the form of her lover until the darkness hid him from her view.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CAPTURING A SPY.

GIVING free rein to their steeds, Pierre and Silva rode on for some miles, chatting pleasantly, and as if fearing no danger; but they were both men too well used to lives of peril to show what they felt, and though they appeared unwary, their eyes were constantly on guard for the slightest sign that betokened danger.

At length, letting their horses come to a walk, Silva said:

"Have you any objections, lieutenant, to aid me in the capture of a certain person, whom I have had my eye on for months, but never could catch; I refer to a Mexican who is acting as a spy for the American army, or it is so believed, but is in reality in the service of the Mexican Government; it is only within the last day that I have become convinced of his treachery?"

"It will give me pleasure to aid you; where shall we find him?"

"To-night at a hacienda two miles from here, where his brother lives; we will go by and see what we can do, for by his capture we can render our army a great service."

"By all means let us make the attempt, then," and without more ado, the two turned from the broad road into a path leading to the left, and as they rode along Silva explained to Pierre the nature of the country through which they were going, and the most direct way to return to the coast, in case they became separated.

After riding about a mile, they heard the

sound of voices, and hastily drew to one side of the road, shielding themselves from observation in the edge of the forest.

"List! that is a party of cavalry coming; I hear the ring of their sabers," said Silva, loosening his pistols, and preparing for resistance.

Soon four horsemen, clad in uniform, could be seen indistinctly coming toward them, riding in a slow trot, and laughing and talking together.

"That is an advanced guard; what is to follow I wonder?" whispered Silva, as the squad rode by their retreat; and were shortly afterward followed by another group, two men on horseback, and two on foot, and as they came near to the Americans in ambush, Silva whispered:

"The spy, as I live; I know his voice, and that is a Mexican colonel with him."

"Who are those on foot?" asked Pierre.

"Prisoners, from our army, and these fellows evidently have a rear guard; but now for a bold move; come," and turning his horse directly into the dense woods Silva rode away, followed by Pierre.

After a little while they came into an open space, and across this dashed at full speed, and again entered a dark copse of woods through which they rode rapidly for a quarter of a mile, until the light through the trees ahead showed another opening.

"Now we are in good time," said Silva, pulling up his horse; "those fellows will pass directly by here, and we must both fire upon the advanced guard, and none of them must escape; we must then seize two of the best of their horses and await the coming of the others, who will run to the support of their guard; you take the horses to the two prisoners, I will look after the spy, and then you take charge of the general, and bid the two Americans to resist the rear guard, who will be up about that time; it is a cavalry squad and there will be pistols in the saddle-holsters, for the prisoners to use; now do you understand my plan?"

"Assuredly, and with rapid action and boldness it can be carried out successfully," and Pierre could not but gaze upon the man beside him, who had so calmly and with such recklessness planned an undertaking, seemingly so desperate.

"He is a good match for Claude Alberti," he thought, as he drew his revolver and settled himself in his saddle for the combat.

"There they come; we will fire at the word—you take the two in advance, I will take the others," and nothing more was said, while the voices of the unsuspecting Mexicans grew louder and louder as they drew near the spot from which the death-dealing pistols of the Americans were to flash upon them.

"Are you ready, lieutenant?" asked Silva, in a cool, steady voice.

"I am ready," was the equally cool reply, when the former cried:

"Then, fire!" and four rapid shots broke upon the stillness of the night, and three heavy falls proved that the bullets had found their marks, while the fourth Mexican was seen to toss his arms wildly in the air, and then falling forward in his saddle was borne rapidly away by his frightened steed.

"So far, good," and Silva dashed from his hiding-place and seized the rein of one of the fallen riders' horses, while Pierre caught another as he was bounding away.

"Back! into the woods, they are coming," and throwing the rein of the horse he had captured to Pierre, Silva again prepared for the fray.

The spy was seen to be in advance, while the officer, by whose side he had been riding, was guarding the two prisoners.

Driving the spurs deep into his horse, Silva was in an instant by the side of the spy, his hand clutching his throat, his pistol in his hand.

"Surrender, or you die!"

"I surrender," was the sulky reply, as he handed his pistols to his captor.

Pierre in the mean time had moved out as rapidly as he could, leading the horses, and approached the Mexican officer and his captives, saying in English:

"Here, Americans, take these horses and mount," and he threw them the reins, while the Mexican cried, as he held in his hand his drawn sword:

"There is certainly some mistake in all this."

"None whatever, sir, you are my prisoner; if you resist I shall kill you," answered Pierre, in Spanish.

The officer lowered his sword, and as he did so Silva approached, holding the rein of the spy's horse, and said:

"Lieutenant, take the bridle-rein of Colonel De Garmo's steed, and we will move on. Are you ready, men?" he continued, addressing the two prisoners, who had mounted the horses so unexpectedly brought to their aid, and were awaiting orders.

"Well, then, form our rear guard; you will find pistols in the holsters on your saddles."

"Yes, sir, we have them; there are half a dozen Mexicans in the rear guard yet to come."

"Well, one of you take charge of this spy, kill him if he attempts to get away, and the other aid me; now let us be off."

"Hold, Silva, you guard the spy and lead the way, for I do not know the country; let this gentleman, whom I see is an officer, give the Mexican the pleasure of his company, while I and this other officer—I judge by his shoulder-straps—fight back those devils; here they come now."

All this had transpired in less than three minutes, and in that time the rear guard of the Mexicans, six in number, and who had been lagging some distance behind, had come up, and with drawn sabers were rushing toward the scene.

Like the swoop of a hawk upon its prey, Pierre darted from the woods, upon the advancing squad, firing rapidly with his revolver twice, and then drawing his saber.

The American officer followed him, firing with the large pistol he had taken from the saddle-holster.

Two of the Mexicans fell beneath the unerring aim of the Americans, and another was cut from his saddle by a tremendous sweep of Pierre's saber, which he had taken from the Mexican colonel.

The remaining Mexicans wheeled in the greatest fright, and driving the spurs into their horses, fled hastily from the scene that had proved so disastrous to them.

"I call that brilliant, lieutenant; a magnificent charge," said Silva, in admiring tones, as Pierre wheeled his horse and rode back to join him.

"We have captured and put to rout the whole party, so now we will hasten," and leaving the dead Mexicans lying where they had fallen, Silva led the way at a rapid gait, keeping close by his side the spy, and was followed by the others, one of the American officers guarding the Mexican colonel, whom Colonel Elverson had recognized as an officer of high standing.

After riding for half a dozen miles, the party drew rein, and Silva said quietly:

"Colonel De Garmo, I dislike to offer any indignity to a prisoner, but my own safety will cause me to blindfold both yourself and this spy; also, that you may not remove the bandages from your eyes, and discover whether you are to be conducted, I must tie your hands to the horn of your saddle. I regret it, in your case particularly, but it must be done."

"I am your prisoner, you can do as you please," tartly replied Colonel De Garmo, while the spy said mockingly:

"So I have found you out, my fine fellow, Silva Elverson; you are in the pay of the United States, are you? You shall swing for this, young man."

"Catching before hanging," Pinto; you know the old saying; and in your case I think you'll find that it is 'hanging after catching.'"

The two were securely bound, and their eyes blindfolded, and then Silva turned toward the two American officers whom he and Pierre had released from their captivity, and said:

"I beg pardon, gentlemen; you both wear the uniform of the United States army; am I to understand that you are officers in that service?"

"You are; my name is Walter Vane, lieutenant-colonel of the —th regiment of New York volunteers, and this is my friend, Captain Ivan Le Roy, of a Mississippi squadron of cavalry; we were captured some days ago in battle, and escaped from prison, and were making our way to the coast when we were retaken to-night by the party whom you so signally defeated by your most remarkable daring; and need we say we owe you many thanks for our release from prison?"

The officer, Colonel Vane, was a middle-aged man, with a rather stout figure, and a jovial face, while his companion was a slender youth, scarcely out of his teens, but possessing a frank, generous countenance, intermingled with courage and a love of fun, and while his companion had spoken in an earnest tone, the young soldier added in a merry voice:

"I would join my thanks, gentlemen, with Colonel Vane's, but my tongue has been so backed by my teeth, from riding that Mexican horse, I have no power of speech; I should like to see the Mexican who made his living by riding that horse; I cannot understand how a pistol-shot could kill him."

"That's a rather long talk for a man who has no power of speech left in him. Ivan, I would dislike to hear you undertake a discourse," laughingly put in his superior officer, and mounting their horses the party again moved forward, Pierre and Silva leading the horses of the Mexican colonel and the spy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RETURN.

THE sun was just sinking from the sight of those upon the deck of the Dare-Devil, behind the rocky hills of the basin, when Claude called to Nunez and told him to get the gig ready for their second trip to the cave of

Bozzaro, and he also told Preston May he would like to have him accompany him.

Preston was glad of the opportunity, and arming himself, was soon upon deck, awaiting the time of the departure.

Claude soon appeared, and leaving Oscar in command of the schooner, he entered the gig with Preston and the pilot, and rowed away.

Through the same winding and dismal tunnel of the night before, the pilot guided the gig, and when they arrived at the underground passage leading to the cabin of Bozzaro, it was decided that they should go by that way, and not through the woods as before.

Accordingly Nunez searched for the torches and tinder-box in the place where he knew the fisherman kept them, and having struck a light, they fastened the boat and proceeded upon their way, Preston being greatly surprised at the strange underground manner of traveling.

"This seems like the road to Purgatory, Claude," he remarked, dolefully, as he plodded along over the slippery rocks.

"How do you know, Preston?"

"Not from experience, I assure you, but from imagination of what that road should be. Why, I would not be at all surprised to meet Satan here; I would simply say 'Good-evening, your Evil Majesty,' and endeavor to hank him—Ha! there he is now—I told you so," and the deep baying of the hounds echoed and re-echoed through the caverns.

Both Claude and Nunez laughed at Preston's remark, and the latter responded:

"You are about right, Mr. May; those dogs are devils by nature—here they come, on the run," and the bushy figures of Santa and Anna were seen coming toward them.

"Down, devils that you are," ordered Claude, and recognizing him, as the friend of the night before, they crouched at his feet, and then trotted along by his side, having given a curious look at Preston, who remarked:

"If we don't see Satan here, it's because he's afraid of those dogs; now, with all due respect to the canines, I would like to know what a man means by keeping such house pets as those; I was going to try petting them as a sedative upon their angry passions, but the words 'pretty dog,' 'nice little puppy,' seemed like such an enormous lie that it stuck in my throat," said Preston, after he saw that the dogs meant no harm.

Soon the door leading to the basement of the cellar was reached, a tap was given, the slab was drawn back, and ascending the stairs the privateersmen stood face to face with Bozzaro.

Preston May was presented to him, and raised a general laugh, by insisting that the introduction should be immediately extended to the dogs also, which was accordingly done by Bozzaro calling them to him, and proving that the lieutenant was their friend.

"Pierre and the colonel have not returned yet?" asked Claude.

"Nor will they for some hours yet; so sit down, gentlemen, and make yourselves comfortable, while Nunez and myself prepare some refreshments, and get up from the cellar some good old wine," and while Claude and Preston seated themselves at the table and commenced looking over some charts of the coast, the fisherman and pilot prepared a sumptuous repast, of which they all soon after partook with considerable relish.

While engaged in an earnest conversation some time after, the dogs started to their feet and commenced to scent around the door.

"What is it, puppies?" asked the fisherman, in a coaxing tone, while Preston queried:

"Those are only the puppies, are they, Bozzaro? Consider me out, when you hold an exhibition of the grown dogs; puppies! the parents of those little things must be elephants in size."

"I do not think you fancy the dogs, lieutenant?" said Nunez, laughing.

"The truth is, I fear they fancy me; if I was a coon up a tree, the very bark of those 'puppies' would shake loose my hold, and I'd fall to the ground; but, Bozzaro, what is in the wind, now, that makes them cut up such gymnastics?"

"They scent some one coming; ah, it is Silva, for they show no sign of anger," answered the fisherman, and as he spoke the sound of horses' hoofs were heard outside.

"There are more than two horses in the party, from the sound," said the fisherman.

"Perhaps it is the horse that Adina rode, that they have led back," suggested Claude.

"No, Silva was to leave him, for he belonged upon the hacienda adjoining Señor Delavan's. I must be cautious."

A slight tap at the door, then another, followed by a peculiar rattle with the finger-nails, caused a brighter look to come upon the face of Bozzaro, who immediately opened the door and Silva stepped in, saying:

"Close the door, please, I have company."

"Whom?" asked Bozzaro, while Claude questioned, anxiously:

"Where is Pierre?"

"Safe, and with me, and the maiden with her uncle, who welcomed her warmly; my guests are two prisoners: the spy, Pinto, and Colonel

De Garmo, whom we captured, and two American officers, who were their prisoners."

"Good, you have the spy then, and also Colonel De Garmo; a lucky haul for you, my boy, and a serviceable one to the United States. Was there no guard with Colonel De Garmo, Silva?"

"Yes, one of ten men; we, the lieutenant, who, by the way, is the devil in a fight, and myself killed seven of the guard, and demoralized the remaining three, who took themselves off in a hurry."

"Pierre is never found backward in a legitimate fight, colonel; but allow me to present to you another of my officers, who, though afraid of dogs, dreads no man living; my first officer, Lieutenant May, Col. Elverson."

The two young men warmly grasped each other's hands, both recognizing in the other's face the sign of true courage, and feeling an admiration that was evident in their looks.

A hurried consultation was held, and it was decided that the prisoners and the two American officers should be brought into the cabin, the horses hidden away in a shed adjoining the hut, and the whole party adjourn to the yacht, for Claude wished Bozzaro and Silva to see his vessel, and, when on board, he desired to hold a consultation with them in the presence of all his officers, regarding their future plans of action.

Still blindfolded and bound, the prisoners were aided to dismount, and with the army officers entered the cabin.

"Ye gods! Preston May, as I live," exclaimed Captain Ivan Le Roy, upon entering the cabin, and catching sight of that individual, who, glancing toward him, sprung forward with extended hands, saying:

"Ivan, my dear boy, I am charmed to meet you; what brings you to Mexico?"

"The same that brought you here, I suppose—to serve my country; but who would know you in that ghastly rig?"

"Hush, that is a secret. I am glad to meet you—introduce me to your friend, and I will present you both to my commander, and the others present, with a piece of sound advice, 'Beware of the dogs,'" and Preston pointed to the two innocent causes of his jokes.

The introductions were soon made, and then the whole party started for the basin, by the underground way, the fisherman leading, while Pierre and Silva aided the two prisoners over the wet rocks.

The water tunnel was soon reached, the boat untied and turned around, and then the whole party entered, and floated down the stream.

The basin or river came in view, and taking the oars Nunez and Silva urged the boat rapidly through the waters toward the schooner, on the decks of which all were in a short time safely landed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

It was toward evening, of the day following the incidents related in the foregoing chapter, that all was in readiness on board the *Dare-Devil* to again put to sea and face the dangers of the deep and the Mexican cruisers.

An arrangement for a land expedition, at another point upon the coast, had been entered into between Captain Alberti and Col. Elverson, and the latter had returned home with Bozzaro, during the day, and again come on board, dressed and armed in his full uniform of a colonel of cavalry in the United States army; and very handsome did he look in it, too, and the encomiums passed upon his magnificent appearance by the sailors would have been flattering to his pride, had he heard their remarks.

Bozzaro had enjoyed his visit to the yacht exceedingly, and his seaman's eye roamed over her beautiful hull, tall, tapering masts and clouds of white canvas with the greatest admiration.

Upon bidding adieu to the officers of the vessel, they all thanked him warmly for his interest in their behalf, and promised at no distant day to pay him another visit.

Thus they parted, Silva returning to the yacht to lead the land expedition, and to conduct the two prisoners under guard to the American army.

"Get the schooner under way, Preston; Nunez, you take the helm," and in obedience to Claude's orders the *Dare-Devil* was half an hour after winding through the narrow and dangerous channel through which the pilot had conducted her into the basin.

"Captain Alberti, I must tell you and Mr. Leon that in going out you merely reverse the instructions I gave you in coming in; now take out your note-book and see that I am right," said the pilot, and Claude and Pierre stood, note-book in hand, ready to mark the correctness of Nunez's words.

The sun had not yet sunk from sight, and a stiff, ten-knot breeze was blowing, causing the yacht to look like a snowy cloud as she bounded seaward, and as Silva stood upon her deck and watched her course, frequent were his expressions at her beauty and wonderful speed.

As she gained an offing from the land, the lookout suddenly cried:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway, my man?" answered Claude. "There are two sails in sight, sir, coming up the coast; and now I see another standing in from the sea," replied the sailor.

"Ho! the deck!" a moment after hailed the lookout.

"Ay, ay."

"There are two more sails, sir, bearing down the coast! five altogether in sight."

"It is the same fleet we saw before—the one at sea is no doubt the schooner that chased us out, and the others doubtless divided forces, two going up, and two down the coast," remarked Claude.

"Evidently you are correct—darkness is coming on rapidly, and we can run through them, and give that Mexican schooner another chance at us; she won't be disappointed in her fight this time," rejoined Pierre.

All was interest aboard the schooner, and Claude said:

"Well, gentlemen, we must not be cheated out of our supper, so come down. Nunez, keep a bright lookout and report progress," and the officers adjourned to the cabin.

In half an hour the men were all again on deck, and found quite a change had come over the schooner.

Darkness now veiled the ocean, more sail had been set, and the men were at their quarters, while the five vessels discovered by the lookout were spreading their wings and making toward a common center so as to intercept the schooner in her outward course.

"Well, Nunez, you have been lively I see, all is ready for action, and those fellows intend giving us a taste of their caliber," said Claude, lighting a fragrant Havana as he ceased speaking.

"Yes, captain, things looked a little squally and I concluded it was best to be ready," answered the pilot.

"You were right; about what speed is the *Devil* making?"

"Close on to twelve knots, for she is racing; but to get out to sea we have got to run the gantlet of those five vessels, and take their fire."

"Very well, we will return their shots with interest; put the best gunners on duty, and spread more sail, all that she will bear, Mr. Minturn."

The officers all at once took their quarters for action, while Silva remained aft with Claude, near the wheel.

"Nunez, I wish you to take the wheel now, and if you need any assistance Colonel Elverson and myself will aid you."

"I can handle her, captain; but I'll call on the colonel if I want help, for you will be busy; see, sir, they have opened the ball," and a flash illumined the side of the brig commanded by Captain Vesta, and a shot hurried, shrieking, far astern of the schooner.

"Men, turn all your fire upon that brig; fire at nothing else until I give the order. Are you ready?" cried Claude.

"Ay, ay, sir," came from the different guns, and then the commander said, quietly to Nunez:

"Bring her up a little—fire!" and a sheet of flame burst from the schooner, a rushing of iron through the air, and the brig reeled beneath the balls hurled against her.

"Fire, again, and keep it up lively; bring her up three points, Nunez, so the guns can command the brig."

"Now we are getting it," said Silva, and thick and fast the five vessels poured in their shots upon the flying schooner, while, in obedience to Claude's orders, the guns of the schooner were only turned upon the brig, the nearest to her, and the largest of the fleet.

"I wonder what the spy and colonel think of the racket?" asked Captain Ivan Le Roy, as he and Colonel Walter Vane joined Claude and Silva aft.

"They are sorry they have gone to the *Devil*," returned Silva, playing upon the yacht's name.

"By Jove, captain, that shot told; there go her masts," exclaimed Colonel Vane, who, with his friend, was observing with great interest the *modus operandi* of a sea fight.

"Yes, and there goes her other mast, by Heaven! we have made a wreck of her. One more shot all round, men, and then turn your fire upon that old tub upon the starboard; are you ready?"

"Ready, sir."

"Fire!—make her your target now until further orders," and the heated guns belched forth their anger against an awkward-looking vessel about a mile distant from the starboard bow.

"Are we not in luck, not a shot has touched our darling?" said Preston May, running aft for a moment.

"Yes, Preston, but it cannot last much longer," rejoined Claude, who, cool and quiet, watched every motion of his vessel as narrowly as he did the movements of his enemies.

"See!" he suddenly exclaimed, "the brig is signaling the schooner, our old friend."

"True, that leaves but three in the fight, for these are signals of distress; by heaven! she is on fire," said Silva, watching through his glass.

"And true it was, the brig had signaled for aid, which was needed, for soon the red flames broke

from her port-holes, and hurrying forms were seen lowering the boats.

A loud cheer broke from the yacht's crew as they saw it, and before the echo had died away, and as if in punishment for their joy over the agony of their fellow-beings, a crashing broadside was poured upon the schooner from the vessel upon which her guns had been directed, and while some of the iron hail passed through the rigging, here and there cutting a rope and piercing a sail, a few shots, fired with more accuracy, tore through her bulwarks and over her white decks, staining them with the blood of half a dozen of her crew.

"Avenge your comrades, men!" shouted Claude.

"Keep her off, Nunez. Ha! she is signaling us; by George, it was her last shot; see, she has surrendered! Now for that three-masted schooner, men."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Keep it up lively. Hey, she answers," and again a hail of iron swept over the yacht, here and there splintering her decks, and killing and wounding three or four of the crew.

"Not a sail shot away; ha! men, who have you there?" and Claude turned toward four men who were bearing a limp form between them toward the cabin.

"Lieutenant Minturn, sir," answered one of the men.

"How is he wounded?"

"He is dead, sir."

"Dead—lay him there then, and back to your posts," and the young commander's voice was sharp and stern.

"Where did the shot come from that killed Lieutenant Minturn, Mr. May?" called out Claude to his first officer.

"From that three-masted schooner," answered Preston.

"Stand down toward that schooner, Nunez; by heaven, I will avenge him," and there came that hard, cruel look into his face, that his men had learned to fear.

"Turn your guns on that schooner, and do not cease firing until I order you."

Dashing the spray high in front of her sharp bows, and leaving a snowy track in her wake, the swift yacht rushed down upon her adversary, as if conscious she was going to avenge the death of her defender.

"Keep her on, steady," called out Claude, as she rapidly neared the Mexican vessel, and still rushed through the storm of fire, her path lit up by the bright glare that came from the burning brig.

Off on her starboard quarter was the second vessel that the true marksmanship of the gunners of the Dare-Devil had crippled, and she was standing, with all the speed she could make, over to the aid of the burning ship, near which the old antagonist of the Wanderer was hovering in the endeavor to save her crew from drowning.

"The three-master is flying, Captain Alberti," called Pierre from forward, and certain it was that she was standing away from the path on which the yacht was steering.

But on kept the Dare-Devil, the eyes of all aft turned upon her young commander, who paced the deck, coolly glancing ahead at the two vessels still in action against him.

"Bring her round now, Nunez; there, steady. Give her your broadside now, together, all."

"Fire!" and a tornado of iron swept down upon the Mexican.

"Again, starboard, fire!" and again, and again, the guns poured forth their anger, until the foremast and bowsprit of the Mexican were shot away.

"Cease firing! Stand out to sea, Nunez. Preston, turn the stern pivot upon that craft that has kept out of the way of danger. Pilot, make a grand sweep to seaward, and then put her away for Vera Cruz; we are too badly crippled to continue the fight against such odds."

And having given his orders, Claude went forward to see to the dead and wounded, while the graceful vessel flew away from the scene, her path across the ocean lit up by the burning brig, and followed by the shots of the Mexican vessels, to which the large pivot gun upon the stern ever and anon replied in sullen tones.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AFTER THE ENGAGEMENT.

MORE than a month has gone by since the scenes narrated in the last chapter, when the last seen of the Dare-Devil she was standing out to sea, preparatory to shaping her course for Vera Cruz.

Upon examination into the injuries sustained by his vessel, Claude found that they were of such a nature as to warrant his returning to the rendezvous near Bozzaro's cabin, for not only were her bulwarks badly shattered, but her foretopmast was nearly cut away, her decks were torn in several places, one gun-carriage was damaged, and, worst of all, Lieutenant Oscar Minturn and three of her crew had been killed outright, two other seamen were in a dying condition, and half a dozen others were wounded; all these causes combined determined Claude in again putting into the basin, so just

as day broke the morning after the severe gantlet she had run, the yacht dropped anchor in the quiet harbor.

In a lonely spot, shaded only by one tree, the bodies of Oscar Minturn and his brave comrades, who had with him met their death, were consigned to the earth, far from the homes they loved so well.

Old Bozzaro was present, for he had heard the firing, and going upon the cliffs had watched the combat with the deepest interest, and right glad was he when he saw the Dare-Devil again coming landward.

But a foreboding seized him; was Claude coming to bring him the body of his brave boy? no, he would not, he could not believe it, and with hurried steps he sought the low banks of the basin, and boarded the schooner as she dropped anchor.

Under the glad sunlight the dead were placed in their narrow homes, Claude in his full, impassioned voice reading the beautiful burial service of the Episcopal church.

Many a bronzed cheek was wet with tears, as the deep tones of the young commander rose and fell in the ceremony, and when the bodies had been covered the sorrowing crew returned sadly to their vessel.

Thus, in that quiet basin a month went by, and at the end of that time the Dare-Devil was again ready for work.

Her damages had all been repaired, her wounded crew were again well, and Bozzaro, Silva and Claude had sailed in the little Zephyr to a seaport up the coast, and had returned with large quantities of supplies necessary for the schooner's continued cruise.

While gone, Claude had learned all the news of the contending armies in Mexico, and of the brilliant victories that had been won by the Americans; also, did he find out what was thought of his own vessel; how some along the coast told marvelous stories of the specter schooner being seen night after night hovering just in sight of land; how, alone, she had attacked the Mexican fleet of five large vessels, and after burning up the largest with her balls of fire, and crippling two others, she had sailed away to sea unharmed; also, the story of her two other wonderful escapes was told and retold, with exaggerations; and again it was said that she had been seen off the coast one night and the following morning the bodies of a number of Mexican soldiers were discovered, dead where they had fallen; also, the distinguished Colonel De Garmo and the spy, Pinto, had disappeared, no one knew whither.

All these stories were afloat regarding the Dare-Devil, which every superstitious Mexican spoke of as the "Specter Yacht."

Claude was glad that his vessel had created such an impression among the Mexicans, and determined to do all in his power to increase the mystery, and add to the supernatural belief regarding the schooner.

Silva had made several of his expeditions about the country on horseback, and had gained considerable news that would be of great value for future operations, and Claude had become so much interested in the brave young man, he offered and urged him to accept the position left vacant by the death of Oscar Minturn.

At length Silva accepted, and became an officer of the Dare-Devil, feeling assured that he could be of equal benefit to the United States in that position as in the one which he had been occupying.

Bozzaro had also strongly urged its acceptance, for he feared the lonely and dangerous life he was leading on land would very soon end in his death.

"Besides, my boy," he said, "I can gather all the news for you, and as Captain Alberti has now made the basin his regular rendezvous you will put in here at least once a month and I can see you."

Thus the matter was settled. The two army officers, though anxious to again be with their commands, were not fretted by the long stay of the schooner in the basin, for they enjoyed the company of the yacht's officers, had plenty of books to read, good fare, and in fact had a pleasant time, for tarpaulin tents had been spread upon the shore, and they were no longer confined to the decks of the vessel.

Colonel De Garmo had willingly given his parole as an officer and gentleman, not to attempt to escape, or to take advantage of what he might hear or see, and Claude had admitted him to the officers' mess, and given him many privileges, and he proved to be a jovial companion and good-hearted fellow.

The spy, however, Pinto, was the sufferer, for he was kept closely confined aboard the yacht, and bitter were the curses he heaped upon the Americans, and the vows he made that he would be avenged.

As the day drew near for the yacht to sail, Pierre determined to request of Claude permission to visit the Delavan hacienda to see Adina Gomez.

He had already informed Claude of his engagement to the fair girl, and been congratulated by his commander upon his good fortune.

Claude disliked to have his lieutenant run so

great a risk, but at last consented, if Pierre could get Silva Elverson to accompany him.

That young officer was only too eager for any adventure in which there was danger to face, and readily consented; so, dressed in plain civilian's clothes, the two left the schooner just at nightfall and set out upon their journey.

Horses were procured, as before, by Silva, and after a hard ride they reached the Delavan hacienda just after daylight.

The two were warmly received by both Don Delavan and the lovely Adina, whose change from her Persian to her Mexican costume proved very becoming.

She had also become more womanly since her contact with society, and Pierre mentally observed that he had never seen a more beautiful creature, and Silva, in his own mind, seconded the thought.

Being invited in to breakfast, Pierre was prepared to meet a Mexican naval officer, for Adina had told him that her cousin, who belonged to the Mexican navy, was on a visit of a few days to his uncle; but he was not prepared to recognize in that officer Captain Adrian Vesta, whose schooner had been defeated by the Dare-Devil, when she was the Wanderer, off the coast of Maine.

He shook hands cordially with the officer when introduced, for he had admired the man's courage upon the occasion of the fight, and was glad to see that he was not recognized in return.

Captain Vesta wore his left arm in a sling, and he informed Pierre that he had been wounded in an engagement, his brig had had a month since, with a vessel known along the coast as "The Specter Yacht."

Pierre dryly remarked that he had heard of the vessel, and then said:

"I am glad your wound was no worse."

"Thanks! it disabled me for the time; my brig was set on fire and burned up, I having to signal to a schooner, I once commanded, to come to my aid, and the daring yacht crippled severely two others of the fleet, and then sailed away, apparently unhurt, though we rained shot upon her for half an hour."

Pierre thought of poor Oscar Minturn, and the poor fellows then sleeping their death-sleep, not many miles away, and how long it had taken to put the yacht in trim again, but he rejoined, as he glanced carelessly over at Adina, whose innocent expression was worthy the study of an artist:

"From all accounts the Specter Yacht is very daring."

"Indeed, her commander is a perfect daredevil."

At this, the three knowing ones around the table exchanged glances, and the captain continued:

"I was second lieutenant of a schooner that was met and defeated off the Maine coast by this same vessel, I am convinced; but then she was under different colors; her officers were all young men, her commander a dark, handsome, splendidly-formed creature, that handled a sword dangerously, and was a true shot with his revolver; he was as courteous to me as a cavalier could have been, and I had reason to thank him for his great kindness. Soon after he destroyed the three-masted schooner, Zanzibar, and now I feel certain is one and the same, as the captain of this specter schooner."

"Cannot the schooner be captured?" asked Silva, quietly.

"There is nothing floating that can sail with her; my old vessel is now undergoing a thorough overhauling and refitting, and as soon as I recover, which will be in about a week, now, I intend to follow the specter like its ghost, and see if she can defeat me with the crew and vessel that is now destined by our Government for her capture."

"I hope you may find her, captain," and with that they all arose from the table, and while Silva and Captain Vesta passed the day together, the lovers spent the time in each other's society, for Don Delavan was busy with his home affairs.

At nightfall Pierre and Silva bade farewell to their friends, and, mounting their horses, set out upon their return to the coast.

Without accident they arrived before morning, and just as Claude and his officers were sitting down to breakfast, they entered the yacht's cabin, and received a warm greeting from all. Colonel De Garmo not excepted.

"Claude, who do you think is Adina's cousin, and whom we met at the Don's?"

"Santa Anna?" queried Claude.

"Ah, those devilish dogs again," sighed Preston May, helping himself to a broiled fish.

"Nonsense, Preston, General Santa Anna, the captain means," said Ivan Le Roy, while the lieutenant's quiet:

"Ah, yes, the other dog," caused a general laugh, Colonel De Garmo joining in, for he hated bitterly the Mexican leader.

"Wrong, Claude—not General Santa Anna, but Captain Adrian Vesta, the second officer of the Mexican schooner we fought in Northern waters, the flag officer of the fleet of five vessels we met the other week, the captain of the brig we burned, and now at his uncle's recover-

ing from a wound he received in the arm that day, and preparing to take command of his old schooner which, with a picked crew and able officers, has been selected by the Mexican Government to hunt the Specter Yacht to her death."

A burst of applause answered Pierre, while Claude remarked:

"He was a splendid fellow, that lieutenant, and he shall have an opportunity of finding us; when will he be ready?"

"In a week or ten days," said Silva.

"Then, gentlemen, we must soon put to sea, for we have other work to do ere we meet the Mexican cruiser," replied Claude; and three days after the Dare Devil was once more upon the ocean, looking up new adventures.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NIGHT EXPEDITION.

INCAUTIOUSLY, and yet with no apparent thought that either Silva or Pierre were in any way connected with the American service, Captain Vesta had informed Silva of an old stone hacienda not many miles from Tampico, where a number of distinguished officers were wont to meet in council and plan movements against the Americans, both by sea and land; that upon a certain night he would have to be there to receive his orders for his cruise after the Specter Schooner, and it was off that part of the coast where he was to join his vessel.

Silva had told Claude of his conversation held with the Mexican captain, and the daring young commander of the Dare-Devil had immediately determined to land a force of men near the hacienda, and attempt the capture of all that would be present upon that night.

Accordingly, the helmsman had orders to keep the prow of the schooner up the coast, and some days after her leaving the rendezvous the yacht stood in toward the land, Nunez being at the helm, he having informed Claude that he well knew the hacienda to which Captain Vesta referred.

It was a dark, stormy night as the schooner found shelter in a small bay, and the boats crowded with men armed to the teeth rowed ashore.

Claude had invited both Col. Vane and Captain Le Roy to accompany the expedition, and Pierre and Silva he also determined to carry with him, besides a force of fifty men, and the pilot as a guide.

Preston May and Guy Rivers were left in command of the vessel and the remainder of the crew, and the schooner was kept tacking back and forth under easy sail, and prepared at any moment to put to sea, if any strange sail was discovered.

Nunez led the force over a beaten path for some distance, and then turned off over the hills, and soon came in sight of the lights from a house that was brilliantly illuminated, and from which the sound of music and dancing was heard.

"They are having a *fandango*, Claude; we'll be just in time," said Pierre, and cautiously the long, snakelike line wound over the hill, across the valley and up the slope toward the house.

"Now, men, I wish you to be careful, for there are women in that throng; no man must fire without my orders, unless he is personally attacked; surround the building quietly, and remember, here is the rallying-point. Pierre, you and Captain Le Roy come with me, while Mr. Elverson and Colonel Vane remain with the men."

Claude's arrangements for offense and defense were soon made, and accompanied by Pierre, Captain Le Roy, and the pilot, he walked to the front of the house and, ascending the steps, said to the guard:

"We are naval officers, we are unexpected guests," and while that dignitary saluted with respect the brilliant and strange uniform, the officers entered the hallway and turned into the dancing *salon*, which was a mass of brilliantly dressed officers and gayly dressed ladies.

An instant hush fell upon all present at the strange apparition, the music ceased, and in the momentary silence that followed, not a sound was heard, and then Claude's cool tones broke the spell:

"Pardon us, ladies, you are in no danger, only keep quiet, and do not be alarmed. Gentlemen, the house is surrounded by a force sufficient to crush all resistance; señors, you must surrender yourselves as prisoners of war."

Had a shell burst in their midst it would not have created a greater consternation than did Claude's words.

Women shrieked, and others fainted, while the men rushed hither and thither, toward the doors and windows, only to find them defended by ghastly-looking forms, armed with cutlass and pistols.

Suddenly from the center of the room came a tall figure, and upon his arm leaned a lady of great beauty.

"Gentlemen, I pass here, stand aside," and his voice was as determined as his manner to allow of no resistance.

Again there was silence, while the spectators watched the result of the officer's boldness, and he once more stepped forward, the lady still

clinging to his arm, her eyes downcast, and her form trembling.

"You cannot pass here, Captain Adrian Vesta."

"Hal as I live, the captain of the Specter Schooner," and the Mexican drew his sword, but the young girl sprung between them, and cast an imploring glance upon Claude; he started; it was Adina Gomez, but he would not betray her, and a smile of thanks crossed her face, while she waved the Mexican back, saying:

"Do not dare to draw a weapon in the presence of women; sheathe your sword at once, cousin Adrian."

The Mexican officer obeyed with a muttered curse, while he said to Claude:

"Are we then your prisoners because our hands are so tied we cannot defend ourselves?"

"I came here, Captain Vesta, to capture men not women: I did not anticipate finding a scene of merriment, but a council of war. I will take no undue advantage of any man, hence I will not call upon you to surrender when you have no power to defend yourselves."

"I will now withdraw my men, but I warn you that if I am followed I will turn and sting my pursuers; we have met before, sir, and your schooner is again ready for sea; you are a brave man; in three days hence I will meet you with your vessel twenty miles off this coast, and we can then meet as man to man; before I go, can I have one word in private with you and the lady upon your arm?"

"You can, sir; here is a withdrawing-room where we will not be disturbed," and the Mexican led the way across the hall, while Claude, after telling Captain Le Roy to allow no one to leave, beckoned to Pierre, and the two followed the officer.

As he turned toward the privateersman, upon entering the room, Captain Vesta started back, exclaiming:

"What! you here, Mr. Leon, and in the uniform of an officer of the Specter Schooner?"

"Yes, sir, I am," returned Pierre, coldly, for he liked not the idea of his promised wife appearing so intimate with her cousin, and not once had he sought her eye with the old look of love.

"For this reason I asked you here, captain; I thought you had already recognized my lieutenant, as he met you at Don Delavan's table some days since, and now I would speak with you. Pierre, will you offer your arm to Señorita Gomez, while I have a few moments' conversation with Captain Vesta?"

Pierre obeyed, but with reluctance, and while the two lovers, so near estrangement, walked to the window, Claude turned to the Mexican and said:

"Captain Vesta, it is because I know you to be a brave man, and I believe you to be a true one, that I place the confidence in you that I now intend to; let me give you the history, in a few words, of those two people who stand there, that is, of Mr. Leon, so far as his noble conduct in rescuing Señorita Adina from the bondage in which she was held is concerned."

"I have heard her story, captain, from my uncle, and also from herself; but if you can give me any other information upon the subject I will gladly receive it."

"Your knowing the circumstances will greatly aid me; but I must request that you keep, as a secret, what I now tell you."

"Lieutenant Leon is a friend of mine, who has been with me for years, and is an officer of my vessel—it was at his entreaty I sailed for Corsairs' Paradise and released the fair señorita, and as our nations are at war, there was but one way in which we could get the young girl to the sheltering arms of her uncle: by strategy."

"It would have been very indiscreet for him to have confessed he was an American, so he determined to let his position and nationality remain a secret until the end of this cruel war, or until a time when he could marry Señorita Gomez."

"I am cruising in my country's service, am perfectly willing to meet you and fight you, when I have you at no disadvantage, but to-night your presence, and that of Adina's has saved your brother officers here from capture."

"Now you know all."

"Captain, I sincerely thank you for your trust in me; you are a noble fellow, and so is your lieutenant, who I fear is a little jealous of me, on account of Adina; come, let us settle this lovers' quarrel and then you may hasten away with your men, for soon a brigade of troops will be upon you, as no doubt some one has gotten away to give the alarm," and shaking hands cordially the two young officers crossed over to where Pierre and Adina stood, the maid weeping and Pierre stern.

"Well, señorita, have you no word for me?" and Claude held out his hand.

"Indeed I have; I am both glad and sorry to see you; how will all this end?" answered the maiden, drying her tears.

"By our getting back to our boats as quickly as possible; you and Captain Vesta have conquered our whole force to night," said Claude, pleasantly.

"I have a word for both of you: Mr. Leon

and my dear cousin Adina. I know of the engagement existing between you, lieutenant, and the señorita, and I heartily sanction it, and wish you both happiness. I never had a sister, and Adina is, by blood, my first cousin, and only a few days since promised to take me for her brother. Now you must be off, and in haste, or bloodshed will yet follow this night's trip," and offering his hand to both Leon and Claude, and which each of them warmly grasped, the Mexican offered his arm to Adina, to conduct her back to the *salon*; so with a hasty adieu to her lover and his commander, she accompanied her cousin, while Claude beckoned to Ivan Le Roy and Nunez, and, as quietly as they had come, the specter crew stole away from the hacienda, and rapidly retraced their course to the coast.

The alarm had been spread, however, and in hot haste squadrons of cavalry were upon their tracks, but the men were hurried on, the shore was reached, a hail to the schooner, and the boats rapidly came ashore and the men sprung in, their officers following, and had nearly gained the yacht's sides when their pursuers came in sight, and discharged their pistols after them.

A derisive shout was sent back at the Mexicans; without coming to, the yacht took her crew on board, and shaking out her sails, moved off from the land, disdaining to notice her enemies even by a shot, and in wonder they sat upon their horses and watched the specter schooner until it was lost to sight in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DUEL AT SEA.

TEN days passed on, but storms and rough weather had prevented Claude and the Mexican schooner from meeting, as they had agreed, but at last, as the Dare Devil was struggling with the wind and waves, and in sight of the long dark line that denoted the Mexican coast, the last light of day showed her expectant crew the tall tapering masts and dark hull of the Mexican schooner, bearing down upon them, under close reefed sails.

All was at once animation upon the yacht; the men sought their posts, the officers hurriedly gave orders, and the Dare-Devil was quickly stripped for the fray.

Silently the two handsome vessels bore down toward each other, and soon the darkness no longer hid their white sails from the gaze of the crew on either schooner.

A beautiful contrast they presented, with the tall, tapering masts and low black hull of the Mexican, coming down before the wind, under close-reefed sails, with her men standing quietly at her guns, awaiting the coming combat; while the equally as tall, but raking, slender masts of the American were overhung by a cloud of canvas, almost shading the long, graceful, white hull, dotted with the specter-like forms of her crew, who were also silently awaiting the contest they knew must follow.

The night was dark and threatening, with heavy clouds overhanging the horizon, and the waves were high and foam-capped, but yet the two commanders of the rival schooners determined to risk a combat, and gave orders that the ball should open as soon as the vessels were near enough to each other to be in easy range.

Claude stood upon the deck of the Dare-Devil, quietly watching the approach of his antagonist, and around him were his officers, with Colonel Vane and Captain Le Roy, while near by stood Col. De Garmo, wearing an anxious expression, for he had been so long with Claude and his crew, that he feared his nation's vessel would be conquered by the Americans, whose courage he had learned to admire and respect.

"There, Captain Vesta sends us his compliments," exclaimed Claude, as a bright flash lit up the Mexican schooner, a ringing report was heard, and the iron messenger came shrieking through the air.

"Are you ready there?" again called out the young commander.

"Ay, ay, sir," came from the officers of the different guns, and then in stern tones, Claude cried:

"Fire!" A sheet of flame burst from the yacht, and immediately the Mexican answered by a broadside.

"Bear down upon her, Nunez, and, boarders, stand ready to board," cried Claude, and his calm, ringing tones brought a loud cheer from his crew.

Fast and fiercely the two brave vessels poured in their fire upon each other, and as they drew nearer and nearer together, the orders of the officers and shouts of the men could be distinctly heard.

With her usual good fortune, the Dare-Devil had escaped with little destruction to her rigging, though her white decks were stained around each gun with the blood of her crew, while the Mexican had suffered severely, by having her foretopmast shot away, her bowsprit damaged, and her sails badly torn.

Seeing that he could command the advantage of his adversary as long as his rigging was uninjured, Claude ordered Nunez to make half a

give his orders, and soon Adina, Nellie and Mr. Lyndon were ushered into a boat and rowed to the Dare-Devil.

Claude and Preston were raised from the deck and also lowered into the life-boat, which pulled to the yacht; and soon all the wounded were transferred from the sinking schooner.

All that was valuable upon the schooner was likewise sent away, and then the deserted and sinking vessel was left to settle beneath the waves.

In the last boat Pierre carried the bodies of the Mexican commander, who had so bravely defended his vessel, and of Colonel De Garmo and poor Don Delavan who had been killed early in the action by a shot that had penetrated the cabin of the schooner.

The other dead, both Americans and Mexicans, were left lying where they fell, to go down in their blood-stained coffin to the sailor's tomb, beneath the ocean which had been their home.

Soon all was in readiness, and as the yacht squared away upon her course toward the rendezvous, the crew stood and watched the vanquished schooner until they saw its last dying struggle, a plunge forward, and then its sharp bows cutting downward out of sight, in the vortex of waters.

Nunez stood at the helm and ran the Dare-Devil again through the perilous channel into the safe harbor, and preparations were at once commenced for repairing damages.

Severely in her crew had the brave yacht suffered, and here and there a gaping wound in her side and rigging proved that she needed care and refitting to again put her in sea trim, but gradually the gloom died away, for upon the third day after the battle, Claude, the loved commander, came upon the deck, pale and weak from loss of blood, and with a bandage upon the wound in his head, but once again able to take command.

And Preston May? Wounded nigh unto death, the gallant lieutenant lay in his state-room watched over by the two maidens, Adina and Nellie.

While Claude had lain, prostrated by his wound, Nellie Lyndon had constantly hovered around him, and when he opened his eyes after his long swoon, he was startled to see near him the lovely face of the woman whom he had often thought of while pacing his lonely watch upon the yacht's deck.

There she was before him, and fearing almost that it was a dream, he again opened his eyes.

It was no vision, but a reality, and while his voice trembled he said:

"Miss Lyndon, we meet again; this is—"

"Sh! You must not speak, sir; we were prisoners on board the Mexican schooner; this is the third time you have saved us—"

"The third time we meet—but my officers! my men! tell me of them."

"Be still, captain; Lieutenant May is seriously wounded and lies in his state-room; a number of your men were killed, many more wounded; the schooner was sunk; now strive to sleep," and the fair nurse put her finger to her lips in token of silence.

Claude closed his weary eyes, and after a refreshing sleep woke to find he was only slightly wounded, but had lost a great deal of blood, which had caused him to faint, as if dead, upon the deck of the schooner.

Arriving in the basin, Silva went for old Bozzaro, and the arrangements for the burial of Captain Vesta, Colonel De Garmo and Don Delavan were at once commenced.

Near the grave of Oscar Minturn other graves were dug, and while Claude again read the funeral service, the bodies were consigned to their last resting-place. Adina, Nellie, Mr. Lyndon, and the officers and crew standing around in sad silence.

Adina had learned to love her kind uncle, and bitterly did she mourn her loss; but in losing her natural protector, she had only one person in the world left to turn to, and that was Pierre.

After a talk with Claude and Nellie upon the subject, Adina determined to go to the United States, where she could be married to Pierre, for it was his earnest solicitation that she should do so, and not return again to the hacienda of Don Delavan.

Mr. Lyndon urged that she should return with himself and Nellie, and make her home with them until Pierre was able to claim her as his wife, and Nellie also pleading that she should do so, the fair girl consented, and it was arranged that, as the Dare-Devil was not in a condition, from the losses she had sustained, to continue in the service, as soon as her necessary repairs were completed she should be put away for some port in the United States.

After the repairs had been over, Claude sent for old Bozzaro to come on board the yacht, as he wished to leave with him some instructions before he sailed.

Standing beside him upon the deck was Mr. Lyndon, and that gentleman had just been remarking to Claude if he ever reached home, he would never trust himself again upon the ocean, for from his early life it had always proved treacherous to his family.

Just then Bozzaro joined them, and Claude presented him to Mr. Lyndon, who had before heard him spoken of with praise by those on the yacht.

"Lyndon! Is your name Howard Lyndon?" suddenly asked old Bozzaro.

"It is; why do you ask?"

"My God, be merciful; then, Howard Lyndon, I have a strange story to pour into your ears; Captain Claude, will you go with us to your cabin?" said the old fisherman, in an excited manner.

"Certainly, Bozzaro; but perhaps I intrude; my cabin is at your service, though."

"No, captain, you must come, also; and send for my boy; let him hear, too."

Claude called to a seaman to send Lieutenant Elverson to him, and, leading the way, descended into the cabin, followed by Mr. Lyndon and Bozzaro.

Soon Silva joined them, and he gazed in wonder at the excited face of his adopted father, but without a word took a seat Claude motioned him to.

"You have a daughter; send for her, sir," said Bozzaro, abruptly.

Without a word in reply, Mr. Lyndon arose, and leaving the cabin, soon returned, accompanied by Nellie, who seated herself by her father, her face betraying wonderment at the scene she encountered as she entered, for old Bozzaro, with bowed head and his hands clasped over his face, was trembling, as if shaken by some great internal emotion, while Claude and Silva sat near in silence, and showing no sign that they knew the secret cause of the emotion which shook the fisherman's sturdy frame.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BOZZARO'S STORY.

As soon as Mr. Lyndon was seated in the cabin, Bozzaro raised his head from his hands, and turning to him, said:

"You will no doubt condemn me, sir, when you hear all I have to say; but yet I trust your kindness of heart will cause you to forgive me."

"I have to tell you a story, and I wish you to listen carefully to all I have to say, and pardon me if I go back some years from the present time, for all that I am going to tell you is the truth, and I hope that what I do now may atone for my sin, for I have sinned."

"But one person present is aware of my antecedents, and that person is Silva Elverson."

"He knows what I now tell you, that in early years I occupied a high position in the Mexican service, and that my family was among the noblest in the land."

"But a change came, as changes ever have, ever will, come in Mexico, until it is under the flag of your nation; a change came, I say, in rulers, and I, because I was not a traitor, was outlawed by those who were."

"I left the land for a while, and then returning in disguise landed upon an unfrequented part of the coast and sought my home; it was in ruins, my family were dead, and the earth rested above their blood-stained graves, for Mexico's rulers had placed them there."

"While weeping above the grave of my only sister, I was startled by a touch upon my arm; I sprang to my feet, and saw before me the form of Nunez Valdona, the present pilot of this vessel."

"Poor Nunez! he was the husband of my lost sister, and like myself, he had been outlawed; like myself, he had returned, and together we were mourning over Adélio's grave, and the graves of those we loved."

"We left that sad scene, and upon this coast made our home, and yonder, a few miles off, stands the only habitation I can call my own."

"I became a fisherman, for I was content to toil, so that I might be in the land that held the graves of those I loved, and in that quiet home, and in that humble occupation, I have passed long, weary years; for Nunez left me after a while, and wandered far away, and only of late has he returned."

"Some time after his departure, while out at sea in my fishing-smack, I saw an object afloat upon the ocean, it is now fifteen years ago."

"I steered out to it, and found a boat containing three dead bodies."

"Two of them were seamen, the other was that of a woman, and upon her breast lay a young child, a boy of six years of age."

"The boat I took in tow, the seamen I gave to the ocean, the woman I buried in a small grave near my cabin, and the boy, under careful nursing came to, grew up, and now sits there; his name is Elverson Lyndon."

"My God! I thank Thee; my son; yes, you are indeed my son—here, Nellie, this is your brother, whom we believed dead long, long years ago," and in a frenzy of delight Mr. Lyndon embraced the astonished lieutenant, who at Bozzaro's words had sprung to his feet.

"Hearken to me yet awhile," broke in Bozzaro.

"I have in my possession trinkets I found with the boy; one, a locket worn around his mother's neck, bearing the likeness of you, Mr. Lyndon, for years have not changed you much,

sir, although the silver has crept into your hair; a watch, containing the name of 'Howard Lyndon,' and clothes marked with the name of 'Elverson Lyndon,' this completes the proof that your son is before you."

"Indeed I was blind not to have seen the likeness before, to his mother; my poor, poor wife; it was in Monte Video I married her; her father, Mr. Elverson, was the United States Consul there, and it was while upon the way to visit her parents that the vessel in which she sailed was wrecked and all on board lost, as we believed, for not one word of the ship ever reached us."

"Nellie here was in delicate health when her mother left, and I refused to let her go, so she took you, Elverson; and oh! how rejoiced I am to find you again. Here, my children, you are brother and sister, and come together, as if from the dead; come, let us go and visit the grave of your mother," and Mr. Lyndon bowed his head, and overcome by the joy and sorrow that together mingled in his heart, he wept like a child.

"The moon is at its full to-night, sir; wait until then, and your son can guide you thither, for it has been a favorite resort of his; it would be dangerous to go now," said Bozzaro, and then he and Claude joined their congratulations to Mr. Lyndon, his son and daughter upon their happy meeting.

"Bozzaro, you have been a dear, good father to me, and I cannot blame you for not telling me before who I was: thanks to you, for your past kindness, your past love, would be mockery; but, dear friend, from my heart I appreciate all you have done for me, and beg that you will go with me from this land of turmoil and strife, and in the United States let me find you a home," said Elverson, for such I must now call him, with the deepest feeling, while Mr. Lyndon coming forward said, earnestly, while he took Bozzaro's hand:

"Let me tell you, sir, that you have only kept back from me a great joy; you have not sinned against me, for you saved my son. Come with us, and let my home be your home, and Elverson and Nellie will cheer your old age."

"Yes, do come, sir," and the earnest eyes of Nellie pleaded to Bozzaro.

"Sir, my son, my daughter, I thank you all; I appreciate all you would do for me, but in Mexico I must live the years yet allowed me here on earth; Nunez will not go away with the yacht, for the wound he received may make him a cripple for life, and the captain has promised to let him remain with me; here they will live and die, and I assure you that the lonely grave yonder in the grove will be tended often by me, and while my life lasts I shall keep it sacred," and turning sadly Bozzaro left the cabin of the yacht, Claude soon after following him, and the father and children, reunited after so many years of separation, were left to themselves and their joy and sorrow.

CHAPTER XL.

ADIOS TO MEXICO.

In a few days the repairs of the yacht were completed, and Bozzaro and Nunez were in the cabin bidding adieu to the kind friends who were to leave them that night, and whom they never expected to see again, for Elverson, at his father's and sister's earnest entreaty, had decided to give up his commission, after he had seen the American commander at Vera Cruz, and become a quiet citizen of the United States.

Pierre also had determined to resign from the service, and after marrying Adina settle down to a peaceful life, after his years of adventurous wanderings, and all were urging upon Claude to sell his yacht upon his return to America, and no longer hazard his valuable life; but to their entreaties Claude turned a deaf ear, and planned with Bozzaro and Nunez for future visits to the rendezvous; but first he determined to take Mr. Lyndon and Nellie to their home upon the Chesapeake Bay, and then, forgetting self, to carry Preston May to his home far away in the Maine hills, for the poor fellow still lay in the cabin, suffering greatly, yet slowly recovering from the painful and dangerous wound he had received in his side, during his brave attempt to avenge Claude, whom he believed to have been killed.

The parting words were spoken, the pilot and Bozzaro got into their boat and rowed away, and under a light wind, just after nightfall, the Dare-Devil once more turned her prow seaward, and with Claude at her helm sailed away through the dangerous channel, out of the harbor, through the breakers, out into the open sea beyond, and then shaped her course up the coast toward Vera Cruz.

At a certain point upon the Mexican shore, held by the United States troops, Claude determined to land the prisoners that he had taken from the schooner, together with the wounded men of both crews, as the accommodations upon the yacht were necessarily limited.

After a pleasant and rapid run up the Gulf, the Mexican shores came in sight just at sundown, and the Specter Yacht created quite a sensation upon the land, as she swept majestically up the little bay and dropped anchor.

A boat was manned, and into it sprang Claude followed by Colonel Vane, Captain Le Roy and Elverson Lyndon.

Waving adieus to the party upon the yacht, Claude gave the order:

"Give way," and rapidly the cutter started landward.

As the boat drew near the land a long, dark line of men were distinctly seen, drawn up, and ready to receive either friend or foe.

A moment more a loud voice broke the quiet of the night with:

"Ho! the boat!"

"Ahoy, the shore," answered Claude.

"What boat is that, and what is your mission?"

"It is a boat from the privateer Dare-Devil, of the United States service. I wish to see the American commander."

"All right, you may land," and again the cutter moved forward and shortly afterward grounded upon the beach.

Claude and his officers sprang ashore, and were greeted by an officer in full uniform, who conducted them at once to the quarters of the commanding general.

In that officer both Colonel Vane and Captain Le Roy recognized their old commander, and warm greetings passed between them, for all in the army had believed them killed by the Mexicans.

Colonel Vane introduced Claude and Elverson, and then related to the assembled officers the daring and valuable services rendered by the Specter Yacht and her gallant crew.

"And now, general," said Claude, after a few toasts had been drank in honor of the yachtsmen, "permit me to suggest that I send the wounded men and prisoners at once on shore; my men, who are wounded, I have already paid off and honorably discharged, so that upon their recovery they can do as they please about reëntering the service; the Mexicans, wounded and all, I leave to your discretion; now, while the boats are conveying them to the land, I shall be happy to have you and your officers accompany me to the yacht, where we can drink a toast in good old Mexican wine to the gallant American army, that has of late won the admiration of the world by its glorious victories."

Claude's invitation was willingly accepted, and adjourning to the beach Elverson signaled the yacht, and Guy Rivers at once dispatched the boats ashore.

In the cabin a pleasant party gathered that night, and Claude, in the character of host, presented the officers to Mr. Lyndon, Nellie and Adina.

A sympathetic hush pervaded all, for near them lay the wounded form of Preston May, and the pale face flushed with pride as he heard his name spoken of in such terms of praise by his brother officers, and listened to the toast of the American general:

"To the speedy recovery of Lieutenant May, the bravest of the brave."

The officers of the army desired, one and all, to speak with him, and the brave young sailor felt that it was worth while being wounded in a good cause, if only to have one's praises upon every tongue.

Soon the general and his officers bade farewell to all, and it was with great regret that Colonel Vane and Captain Le Roy said good-by, for they had learned to love the vessel and her noble crew.

But at last the parting words were spoken, the wounded and well prisoners were all ashore, and in readiness the boats awaited to convey the commander and his officers back to the beach.

Taking their seats in the first and second cutters, Claude motioned to the boat's coxswain, and away they dashed landward, while a cheer followed them from the crew.

The yacht at once commenced getting under way, the boats returned and were hauled up into place, and the sharp white prow again cut the waters in her seaward flight, looking indeed like a Specter Yacht, as she moved silently over the dark sea, and soon disappeared from the sight of those who watched her from the shore, and wafted after her the kindest wishes for a bon voyage.

Silently and swiftly the beautiful vessel moved away from the Mexican shores, and Claude's order to the helmsman, "Put her away across the Gulf, quartermaster; her destination is the Chesapeake Bay," proved that she was leaving for a time, perhaps forever, the sunny waters of the South, to seek a northern clime.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

TOWARD evening, upon a lovely day, a few weeks after the scene related in the last chapter, the Dare-Devil was gliding swiftly up the waters of the beautiful Chesapeake Bay, and while the vessel which she passed gave her a wide berth, the groups upon her decks were gazing with pleasure upon the green shores, and handsome country seats which here and there nestled amid the dense foliage of the forest.

Upon the quarter-deck stood Claude, conversing with Nellie Lyndon, and near by were gathered Mr. Lyndon, Elverson, and Guy Rivers, while a little way apart were standing Pierre and Adina.

"How sorry I am that poor Preston cannot be on deck, to enjoy this lovely scene," said Claude to Nellie.

"Yes; but he is yet too severely wounded to move; by the time you reach home he will be better," answered Nellie.

"I hope so; and believe that when again on land, and surrounded by loving friends, he will soon recuperate."

A silence of some moments fell upon them, and Nellie said gently:

"Do you know, Claude, that neither father nor myself know your name, or where you live? We have always heard you called 'Captain Claude,' and seeing that you desired that we should learn nothing about you, we have never asked. Is it fair to me, Claude?" and the lovely eyes were raised to his face in pleading.

"Nellie, I confess that there is a mystery, a dark one, hanging over my life; trust me yet awhile, and you shall know all; now you cannot, for these moments with you I do not wish imbibed by any bygone cruel memories," and the face of Claude Alberti paled as he spoke.

"I trust you, Claude; but see, there loom up the white walls of my home; yonder, through that opening in the trees."

"Yes, captain; we are once again at home, and you must be content to have some of your crew desert you," said Mr. Lyndon, coming forward.

"I am sorry, sir, I assure you; the bright faces of Miss Nellie and Adina have become very dear to us all, and you also have done much to make our sea life pass pleasantly by," answered Claude, earnestly, and then he continued, turning to the helmsman:

"Bring her up a little, quartermaster; I wish to anchor astern of that sloop yonder."

"Ay, ay, captain," and by a skillful turn of the wheel the helmsman brought the yacht round, the anchor was let go, and preparations for going ashore were commenced.

After bidding Preston May farewell, Mr. Lyndon, Nellie and Adina entered the cutter, and accompanied by Claude, Elverson, and Pierre, they were rowed ashore.

A lordly mansion was Lyndon Hall; for, built in the old substantial style, it had around it every luxury, comfort and adornment that wealth could purchase.

Though not expecting their master home, the servants soon had the place in readiness to receive them, and the officers were warmly welcomed by Mr. Lyndon and Nellie, and a cheerful group gathered around the tea-table that evening in Lyndon Hall.

Anxious to hasten on for the sake of Preston May, Claude refused the kind invitation to remain a few days at the Hall, and determined to leave the bay at midnight to continue on his cruise to Maine.

Adina had yielded to the earnest entreaties of Mr. Lyndon and Nellie to make her home with them until Pierre was ready to receive her in a home of his own, and as he and Elverson were determined not to desert Claude and Preston, until they were safe in Maine, the three officers bade farewell to the hospitable owner of Lyndon Hall, and the two lovely maidens, and returned to the yacht, which at once spread her wings and sailed away, watched by the loving eyes of Adina and Nellie, until they could no longer see her white sails in the darkness.

On bounded the Dare-Devil in her northerly course, and the dark outline of the ruined fortress was discovered one night, about ten days after bidding adieu to the inmates of Lyndon Hall.

Standing upon the deck of his beautiful vessel, Claude gazed long and earnestly upon the dark land as it loomed up before him, and as he guided the yacht through the circuitous and dangerous channel, his voice was subdued and stern.

"I will not go into the river to-night, Guy, but anchor under the shadow of the fort, and upon foot go up to Elgin; it is rather late, but they may not have retired," said Claude, and then he continued:

"Let go the anchor, there," and with a splash in the water the iron symbol of Hope sunk out of sight, and the yacht became stationary.

Leaving Guy in command, and with instructions to await his return before he left the anchorage, Claude sprang into his cutter and was rowed ashore.

He landed at the same spot where months before he had stepped ashore with bright anticipations of what awaited him, and having bade the crew to take the boat back, he commenced the ascent of the steep pathway.

Soon the old fort was reached, and its desolation brought deeper anguish to him as he remembered that it was there that he had seen his only brother lying prostrate upon the earth, and shot down by his hand.

"Oh, God! is there no mercy? Is there no atonement for the crime I have stained my life with?" and for a moment his strong frame

shook with the deep emotion that almost overpowered him; then silently he turned from the spot, and walked slowly along the avenue leading to Elgin.

As he left the forest shade and entered the lawn, the white walls of Elgin came into full view, and a bright light shone from the library window.

"And that is my home, over whose brightness I have cast the pall of death. Well, I cannot linger here, I must on and face the future; face my aged father, and Alice, with my hand stained with the blood of poor Henry."

"Had I not been bound by friendship to Preston and my crew, who have so nobly stood by me in my wanderings, Cain-accursed, from my native land, I would never again have set foot upon this soil, crime-stained as I am; but my duty called me, and as soon as Preston is ashore I will sail away again, with those of my crew who do not desert me."

Walking onward, Claude approached the mansion, ascended the steps, tried the knob of the door, it turned, and pushing it open he walked in and crossed the hall.

The low notes of a guitar alone broke the stillness; but determined now to face the worst, he opened the library door, and gazed therein.

General Alberti, Henry and Alice were seated there; the latter, with guitar in hand, was just going to sing some ballad, while her guardian and Henry sat near reading.

As the door opened, all glanced up, and while the two men sprang to their feet in awed amazement at the tall figure, clad in white uniform, that filled the doorway, Alice sunk speechless, yet conscious, back upon the lounge upon which she had been seated.

"Claude!" cried Henry, springing forward, but not in time to catch the tall figure of his brother, who, with the prayer upon his lips,

"God in heaven, I thank thee!" fell forward upon his face.

"Quick, father; Alice, get me water, he has fainted," cried Henry, and tenderly Claude was raised by his father and brother and laid upon the lounge, while Alice ran for restoratives, which were instantly applied.

Soon the dark, stern eyes were opened, and closed again, while a bright tear stole beneath the lid and rolled across the the sea-bronzed cheek.

No word was spoken for many moments, and then a violent quiver shook Claude's frame, and a moment after he arose to his feet, exclaiming:

"Henry, can you ever forgive me, my brother?"

"Let the dead past bury its dead, Claude; I am again well; I have nothing to forgive; but rather should ask pardon of you for stealing from you the love of Alice," said Henry, bowing his head with emotion.

"It is well that it is so. Alice, come here;" and as the young girl approached, Claude took her hand, and placing it in Henry's said:

"My brother, my sister, be you ever happy together; father, give them your blessing;" and the old gray-headed general raised his hands and blessed them.

Seated there in the library, Claude told the whole story of his wanderings, and dwelt long upon his bitterness at the thought that he had slain his brother.

The fame of the Dare-Devil, better known as the Specter Yacht, had spread over the land, and all knew that the wanderer from home, the loved son and brother, the daring, generous Claude, was her commander.

Daily were General Alberti and Henry, and even Alice, besieged with questions from the neighbors, to learn more of the weird-like vessel, that was waging war in the far-off southern seas, and when Claude told of poor Oscar Min-turn's sad fate, and that Preston May then lay grievously wounded in the yacht's cabin, the little group at Elgin bitterly mourned the sad fortunes of war.

It was late at night, when Claude arose to return to the yacht, and it was decided that Henry should arise early and go over to Colonel May's and prepare the family for the return of Preston, and also let the neighbors know of the coming of the yacht, and that she would be up the river during the morning.

As if reluctant to part with the returned exile, General Alberti, Henry and Alice accompanied him on his way back, as far as the fort, and after he had bidden them adieu, they still stood and watched his course back to the shore, heard his loud hail for a boat, and lingered there until they saw the cutter return to the yacht's side, and the tall form of Claude disappear in the cabin.

The whole neighborhood was wild with excitement the following morning at the unexpected return of the long-absent Wanderer; and as the beautiful vessel sailed up the river, her flag at half mast, to prove that she brought ill-tidings of some of her gallant crew, the large crowd, in sympathetic silence, waved their welcomes, and gave vent to no loud demonstrations of joy.

Soon she came alongside of the wharf, and clearing the way, Claude stepped ashore, followed by four seamen bearing a litter, upon which lay the pale, worn form of Preston May.

He was received with silent joy and grief commingled, by his father and sisters, and placed in an easy-carriage and driven home.

A sad group stood there, also; it was the mother and father and sister of poor Oscar Minturn, and the stern eyes of Claude were bedimmed with tears as he told them of his brave death at his post, and of his grave in a foreign land.

Others also had to mourn the death of many brave young fisher-lads who had sailed in the Wanderer, never more to return, but one thought cheered the hearts of all, for it was a balm to their affliction to know that their loved ones had fallen in defense of their loved country, and had died nobly beneath the flag of the stars and stripes.

The gloom soon wore off the neighborhood, Preston May rapidly recovered beneath the kind nursing of his lovely sisters, whose attention soon drove from him the sufferings of his wound; but the dark blue eyes of Isabel May sunk deeply into the tender heart of Elverson Lyndon, wounding him beyond recovery as he daily watched beside his friend Preston.

A month and more glided by, and Preston May having recovered from his serious wound, Claude was anxious to again set sail for a more southerly clime.

Not to the Mexican Gulf, however, gentle reader; oh, no; but to where the green shores of Maryland were washed by the glad waters of the Chesapeake.

Now that he was not stained by the crime of Cain, he was anxious to seek out the fair mistress of Lyndon Hall, and pour into her willing ear his impassioned words of love.

If successful, and he believed that he would be, he determined to go to Washington, and, with Colonel Elverson Lyndon, resign his commission, transform his warlike vessel into a peaceful yacht, and with his bride, and a party of his friends, spend a year cruising in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and then returning, become an honorable and respected citizen of the Great Republic.

With Nellie Lyndon as his bride, he would no longer wish to mingle amid the strife of war, but be content to live and die at peace with God and man.

General Alberti expressed his willingness to accompany him, and Henry and Alice were glad of the opportunity of once more seeing the lovely Nellie Lyndon, and hoped sincerely that her bright face would win Claude's heart; for they little knew that it had already done so.

Preston May and his beautiful sister, Isabel, also were to accompany the party, to the great joy of Elverson Lyndon, and Gertrude May, the second sister of Preston, who had been for some years engaged to Guy Rivers, willingly consented to be one of the number.

General Alberti had urged upon Mr. and Mrs. Minturn to allow their daughter Mamie, a bright, dark-eyed girl of eighteen, closely resembling her brother Oscar, to go under his charge; and as Preston May had sought and won the promise of her hand, and united his entreaties to the others, the Minturns gave their consent, and Mamie was enrolled as one of the yacht's crew, along with the rest of the party; and thus with happy hearts the group stood upon the decks of the metamorphosed Wanderer, and gazed upon the battlements of the old ruined fortress until it grew dim in the distance, as the yacht flew, like a swallow, to a more southerly clime.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

WHAT need is there to say more, gentle reader, who has kindly followed me through all the wanderings of the Specter Yacht?

Or, would you have me tell you what, no doubt, you have already guessed, of the joyful surprise of the inmates of Lyndon Hall, when the storm party from the schooner visited them?

Would you know that Claude Alberti wooed and won the fair Nellie for his bride, and when he and Elverson Lyndon had resigned their commissions, that the beautiful vessel, dismantled of her armament, and refitted as a pleasure yacht, again set sail for Maine, bearing with her Mr. Lyndon, Nellie and Adina, besides those they had brought from the Chesapeake?

Would you have me tell you of a quintette of weddings that were celebrated in princely style in the lordly hall of Elgin Manor, and, with the joyous young couples on board, of a delightful cruise in the fleet craft, whose decks resounded with song and laughter, instead of the roar of guns and stern voices of men in battle, as in the past?

No, you would not have me tell you what already you have surmised, and even to-day some of my heroes and heroines may be known to you, good reader, in their happy homes, for this, is not altogether a story of fiction, and truth and stern reality, as we all know, is far stranger than the strangest romance.

THE END.

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